

IMAGINATION

STORIES OF SCIENCE AND FANTASY

JANUARY, 1953

35c



Deepfreeze

by Robert Donald Locke

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Introducing the

AUTHOR



★
Robert Donald Locke
★

THE first science fiction tale I ever read was an eye-popping Earth-menaced-by-metal-monsters yarn by Hal K. Wells which raised my ten-year-old crew haircut another full inch in thirty minutes. Despite my palpitations, I kept on devouring the genre however—and by the time I was eleven, I was hooked good and proper.

At fourteen, the economic facts of life caught up with me. To s'ake my insatiable literary desires, I ferreted out new sources of income after school. A paper route procured me a new Burroughs adventure each week. Toil behind a soda fountain filled in my collection of back numbers. Luckily, science fiction movies were even rarer than they are now—else I would have soon been the world's youngest, bankrupt.

Time moved on—and one marvelous day, I discovered girls! The budget, pushing two fiscal endeavors at once, developed schizophrenia. Gradually, the mounting cost of dance tickets, gasoline, cokes, hamburgers and dry cleaning shoved my interest in literature aside—a state of eclipse which lasted until V-J Day.

I became an aficionado of swing, with Larry Clinton and Glenn Miller as twin idols. This led ultimately to a dream job as Chicago editor of a dance band journal with only one drawback—the pay envelope. Among some reverently remembered experiences, these loom out: Listening to Louis (Satchmo) Armstrong reminisce about his New Orleans boyhood; interviewing Bing;

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Stories of Science and Fantasy

JANUARY 1953

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The Editorial



SCIENCE fiction's greatest event took place a few weeks ago. We are speaking of the 10th Anniversary World Science Fiction Convention, held in Chicago over the Labor Day holidays. And, believe us, it really was a World convention. Fans arrived from not only every state in our union, but also Ireland, Australia, Argentina, Cuba, our good neighbor countries Canada and Mexico, and many others. Frankly, we were astounded. We've always known science fiction was gaining momentum and popularity, but the size of this convention was staggering. Heretofore the largest convention numbered some three hundred in attendance. In the first two days of the convention in Chicago over eleven hundred science fiction enthusiasts had registered. Hundreds more had sent in their registration by mail but for one reason or another could not attend. The Convention Committee had optimistically predicted some six hundred would attend. When the thousand mark was passed the only problem became one of management—for this was an attendance beyond anyone's wildest dreams.

WHAT went on? We don't have room here to tell you every item of interest during the full three days and nights, but we can perhaps hit a few of the highspots. First of all practically every professional author, editor and sf personality showed up. Many writers and editors and publishers were on

the formal program—but it was physically impossible to include everyone. As a matter of fact the program had been planned several months in advance of the convention and was so well integrated that last minute additions were almost impossible to fit in. There were speeches, of course, editor panels where the editors of all the prominent sf publications discussed their publications with other editors and answered questions from the attending audience. There were skits, movies, a ballet with a science fiction theme, a masquerade ball with many lavish and outlandish costumes, a terrific debate on flying saucers between Willy Ley and Ray Palmer, and of course, a grand banquet. The Guest of Honor was Hugo Gernsback, the Father of Modern Science Fiction, the man who published the first science fiction magazine in 1926, AMAZING STORIES. Hugo was presented with a bronze plaque as a tribute to his contribution to science fiction. There was another guest of honor at the banquet, a man who has also contributed much through the years to put science fiction at its present high level of popularity, Ray Palmer. It was our distinct pleasure to present Ray with a bronze plaque, and believe us that was a touching moment as Ray stepped up to a thunderous ovation.

OF course no convention would be a success without the numerous parties going on in various hotel rooms through the wee small hours.

We tried to take in a number of these shindigs but we could only find the strength to attend a few. We've since decided we got a total of some six hours sleep in three days . . . which will give you some idea that there was never a dull moment.

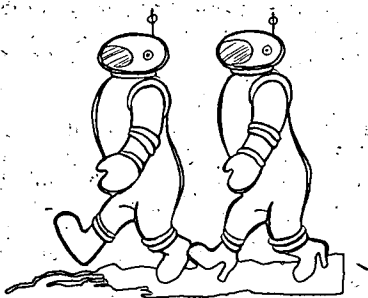
AS in every convention there is always one figure who stands out in your mind afterward as the most interesting person there. In the case of the Chicon we felt a fan named Jim Webbert from Salt Lake City captured that distinction. This fan seemed to be everywhere. In a crowd of a thousand people you couldn't turn around without him standing closeby, a smile on his face and an open cigarette case in his hand. It was a cinch that nobody lacked a smoke for three days . . . And if you happened to wander through the Morrison from the 1st to the 42nd floor along toward dawn (looking for another party to attend), you'd find Jim Webbert on every floor ready to give you room numbers from a well filled notebook. Not only that but he could tell you who was attending each party. The only way we can figure it is that this fan had long solved the secret of teleportation. Certainly no ordinary person could have been in so many places at the same time. A nice guy with a big love for science fiction . . .

ON the last day the site of 1953's convention was selected by popular vote. It turned out to be a battle between San Francisco (represented by The Little Men—who put on many a nice party in the pent-house) and Philadelphia. Philly won, so we'll be looking forward to the progress of the convention plans for that city during the coming months.

ALL we can say in retrospect is that the Chicon put science fiction on the World Map in grand style. It was the biggest and greatest event yet—and for our money is going to be awfully difficult to top. One thing is certain, however: fandom has grown beyond the so-called "active group" stage. Many hundreds of conventioners were not dyed-in-the-wool fans—they were readers and lovers of science fiction. They proved the growing interest in the field and promise much for future conventions. The Chicon opened the door to the general public and we think that's the biggest step forward in many years.

WE can't forget the extensive press coverage either. LIFE and LOOK magazines were there. All of the Wire Services, and of course every newspaper in Chicago. Even the aloof Wall Street Journal gave science fiction a big coverage. (Which proves there must be money in bug-eyed-monsters!)

IT'S all over now, except the many wonderful memories. They'll remain for a long time. You can share some next year—at Philadelphia. After that—maybe it'll be Mars in '54 wllh



DEEP FREEZE

By

Robert Donald Locke

Life and the future belong to the strong—so Dollard laughed as he fled Earth and Mankind's death agony. But the last laugh was yet to come . . .

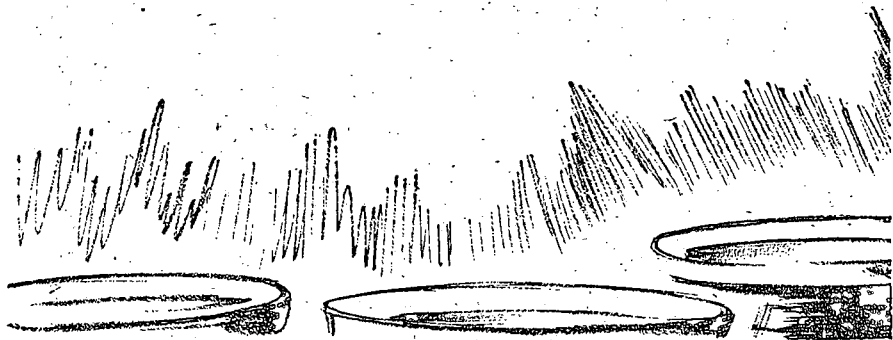
EDWIN Dollard's nervous stubby fingers spilled three precious drops of his fifth Scotch highball, as he veered his head away from the horrors on the telescreen. He was in time to observe Garth enter by the paneled tunnel door.

"Two more hours—and the ship will be ready," Garth announced. "The men still know nothing." His thin lips cracked into a forced smile. "I slipped them the poison at noon mess. There'll be no tales out of those greaseballs."

Dollard's pudgy features relaxed. "Just you and I, Garth . . . to survive. The others—stupid sheep—let them die!" Lust spread his heavy cheeks into a wide grin. "As for women, there'll be time enough for them . . . on Venus."

"I know," said Garth slowly. "Plague-untouched women. It'll be like being reborn again." His pained somber eyes lit up. "It's right good we understand each other . . ."

"Just see that we continue understanding one another," Edwin Dollard snapped. "I'm still the boss."





The last of America's industrial tycoons refocussed his attention on the world telecasts. Since breakfast, he had sat glued to the news while a battery of video announcers reported from central strongholds on the progress of the bacterial epidemic that already had swept the Atlantic seaboard.

"Any late news?" Garth asked, over Dollard's shoulder.

"For your information, I picked up a flash from Denver. Just before you came in—"

"Bad, eh?"

"You said it, Garth. A thousand new cases. Some think the Asiatics got another two or three missiles through the Canadian radar barrier. More likely, the germs hitch-hiked westward on human carriers, gangs of them streaming out of the eastern states. The mobs are like vermin; you can't hold 'em back. They sneak through the quarantine at a hundred points."

"They're people, aren't they?" said Garth, quietly.

"People? They're no more people than the loutish mechs you just did away with today."

"Under your orders," Garth pointed out.

"But it had to be done. Let's not be squeamish children—"

"Yes, so it did. You're safe enough."

"You and I both," Dollard completed. "As long as we're together, we're both safe . . ."

Dollard gripped his hands together and glanced nervously about the timbered walls of his High Sierra lodge, as if to assure himself that this carefully guarded retreat would protect him from the grisly crawling death that was demolishing his invincible country. Even in the presence of his most trusted hireling, Garth, who had been executive officer of Dollard's vast combine, the millionaire was ashamed to admit how the report from Colorado—which claimed the enemy-seeded plague had already crossed the broad prairie states—had been enough to send him into a cowering state of panic. And now, even after assurance that he could soon take off in his private vessel, bound for bacteria-free space and the antiseptic sanctuary of Venus, he was still suffering a paroxysm of fear so great that not even a double slug of his costly hoarded alcohol could banish it completely.

OUTSIDE, hired thugs, outfitted with hydroflame rifles, patrolled the two roads entering the narrow valley—armed with orders to shoot to kill all unauthorized intruders. Already, the guards' task was proving more difficult as refugees from the Los Angeles area poured into the mountains by way of Bishop and Highway 395. Ragged foodless marauders, they swarmed through the resort villages in vicious bands, plundering and murdering in futile efforts to stave off starvation and death.

Dollard got up from his position before the teleset, squinting sideways at Garth while he poured himself three fingers of additional courage. "You're not sorry at leaving your wife?" he inquired. "Ellen meant a lot to you, didn't she, Garth?"

Garth shrugged. "She's safe enough, where she is. That's all that matters."

Dollard poked him in the ribs. "All that matters . . . is survival. You know that, Garth." He chuckled. "Why bother to save anybody else?"

"That's right, sir," said Garth. The muscles of his face continued to compress his features into an unbending mask.

"And one thing's certain, there's no hope for humanity. Not on this planet, at any rate—or not for a long while, I'm positive. You know what they're saying now?"

"No."

"The bigdomes are asserting that only a complete mutation among the unborn can save the higher forms of organic life. Get this, Garth. They say that all the vertebrates, and particularly all mammals, will have to develop new germ-resistant species—or the plague will eventually kill off even the strongest. What's more, those damned Asiatics are in the same boat with us, *at last*."

Garth mulled over the news. He said, "Then, any survivors on earth will have to mutate into something other than mankind?"

"That sums it up . . ." Edwin Dollard raised his highball. "Here's to *homo the sap*," he said in mock salute to the vanishing human race. "The chump had a short life but a merry one—on Terra, anyhow. The poor sucker spent his days in a dream world of fraternity and equality. And all along, we, his superiors, enjoyed the liberty to work him to death for our own benefit. It's a shame there won't be any earthly historians to record man's final irony . . . how we who made full use of the hordes for our convenience should be virtually the only ones to escape the hordes' destruction."

"I see," mused Garth. "That means there's not really much hope for the ones we're leaving behind? I guess I'd always thought . . ." His words trailed off.

" . . . that there'd be a few survive?" Dollard supplied. "Perhaps there will, more probably there won't. What does it matter?

There's only one chance in a thousand of licking the plague . . . from the way the bacteriologists are walling. And even if the race does survive, what sort of existence would it have—battling who knows what kind of monsters some of the other forms of life are bound to change into? No, I'm here to tell you, Garth, the remainder of the race is better off—exterminated. The few plague-free people we'll find on Venus will be enough to launch a greater, prouder race—provided, of course, that I'm their leader."

THE industrialist waddled back to the telescreen, flicked a metal knob that brought into view a transmission on one of the few ultra-high frequency channels still in operation. Electronically-produced colors provided high visual acuity to a scene that depicted Cleveland in flames. Decontamination squads with fire bombs were shown as they sought to cleanse Euclid Avenue of its infected dead.

"Scenes like this have been duplicated in a dozen cities already this afternoon," Edwin Dollard said. "It'd be enough to turn the stomach of a lesser man. Frankly, I'd hoped the health squads could contain the epidemic—but I guess at heart I never entertained any real prospect that they would. As long as we've got a little time to expend, we might as well sit here and enjoy the sight."

"Sit and wallow in it, if you like," replied Garth. "I think I better check the road guards once more. If those plug-uglies smell out your plan to desert them our lives won't be worth a punctured isotope."

"You know I'd go with you," Dollard sighed. "but I fear my presence antagonizes the lower classes somehow. Considering the pay they're drawing down, I'll never understand why, either."

Garth strode to the lodge's steel-plated front entrance, a formidable barrier designed to match the strength of a space cruiser's main airlock. Standing opposite the heavy circular plates, he gestured

before the five heat-sensitive electronic tumblers and the heavy door swung open on oiled hinges. When he stepped outside, the barrier closed behind him.

Alone inside the timbered hide-away, Edwin Dollard immediately shed the affected air of corpulent lassitude he generally displayed in the presence of others. Now that the deadline for his attempt to sneak off the planet approached, it was essential that he attend to the completion of his personal preparations. Above the mantel of the lodge's thermionic fireplace was hung a brilliant cascading stereo of Yosemite Falls in misty motion. Dollard pressed a hidden button. The mantel sank to ground level and the stereo swung outward, bringing into view a shining cubical locker of beryllium steel.

From this hiding place, Dollard withdrew two loaded hydroflame pistols. These he strapped under each armpit. Next, he brought out a palm-sized stunner which he concealed in his hand by aid of a wrist-strap. The fourth object to emerge was a small chunky bag from which dangled tightly-drawn leather thongs. Dollard opened the pouch and poured the contents on to his sweaty palm; a thousand carats of glistening "Syrtis diamonds" from his own private mines. The rarity and value of these jewels, he knew, would be increased by the collapse of the terrestrial civilization that had refined them and cut and

polished their rainbow facets.

These gleaming objects of unfixed price were the guardians that would stand by him during the months it would take to reestablish himself among the colonies on Venus. Not only would they purchase luxuries, but also new servants, fabrication plants, ore boats; possibly, even governments. Above all, they would serve to bribe Dollard's way through the tight network of Venusian immigration officials who might seek—in accord with the laws of their sparsely-settled but independent world—to forbid his landing as a refugee from a diseased planet.

A FULL hour passed before Garth returned, an hour that Edwin Dollard spent pacing the narrow confines of the lodge's central room. His eyes constantly consulted the slow march of minutes on the luminescent dial of his platinum chronometer . . . for while it was not imperative that the space yacht he had refurbished should soar starward at the precise hour agreed upon, there did reign a crucial period of four or five hours immediately at hand, during which the most advantageous passage to Venus should be commenced.

When Garth finally reappeared through the steel doorway, his thin long face reflected the strain he also felt as departure time neared.

"I checked the roadway two miles up the valley," he reported.

"No activity in sight. There was a riot at Leevining, or so one of your guards told me—and a big pitched battle in Bishop between lowlanders and highlanders."

"Another day or two and they'd be swarming all over this region," Dollard said.

"You can bet their first reaction would be to dismantle the ship at sight," Garth informed him. "Lucky we're getting out in time. If the mobs couldn't pilot the vessel themselves, it'd be human nature to see to it that nobody else got to do so, either. Misery loves company—even in the face of death."

"The scum," said Dollard. He donned a jaunty space cap he had often worn on pleasure flights to his outlying holdings. Hooking his thumbs in his belt, he grinned: "Well, Garth, shall we go?"

Garth nodded. He detached a torch that was clasped to his waist, then opened the tunnel door that was carved out of a braced section of the rear wall where the lodge had been built to shore into the mountainside. Entering, the two men threaded a winding route through a narrow dripping passageway, guided by the thin yellow beam of Garth's light. They emerged several hundred feet farther on in a valley of long shadows, cut off from the world on three sides by abrupt cliffs. No ravines opened on this valley. Only by a desperate climb over the surrounding peaks could it be reached—and hence it

had been immune to spying eyes. Here, amounting to a feat of superb pilotage in itself, Dollard's vessel had been landed weeks earlier in anticipation of just such a need as it now served.

Sturdy shubbery screened the tunnel exit, although concealment had not proved to be necessary. As they broke into the light, Dollard and Garth pushed aside stunted conifers and half-stumbled, half-ran down a shale-strewn incline which led them to the valley's floor.

A short northward walk brought them in view of the refitted space craft. Based on stubby fins, it pointed vertically at the sky.

The high sharp ridges surrounding the valley blotted out the late afternoon sun, casting gloom upon the sheer rock walls and overhanging escarpments, and, despite his previous acclimatization to Sierra altitudes, the thin sharp air made breathing difficult for Dollard.

A short distance from where the vessel was cradled, the bodies of five coveralled workmen lay in stiff huddled forms. At the sight, Dollard grunted. "Efficient toxin," he commented. "Good work."

WALKING contemptuously past the bodies, the tycoon approached a work shack which had housed the space ship mechanics. He picked up an aluminum platform-ladder which rested on the trampled grass. Swinging it above his head, he brought it back to the vessel and

hooked it against the rear fin so that the tubular platform lodged itself against the ship's lowest loading hatch.

He turned to Garth. "Too bad we can't run an engine-to-mech check, before taking off. But no mechanics."

Garth said, "Knocking off the men was your idea."

"My conscience'll rest easy with it," Dollard returned. "I was making a joke."

"Very funny joke," said Garth.

"Very funny for you, too," said Dollard.

His fingers squeezed the rubber-mounted grips of the stunner concealed in the palm of his left hand. A slight eye-stinging flash burst in the fading light. As the wave moved outward from the tiny device, Garth stiffened and pitched forward, bouncing perceptibly before his body finally succumbed to the compulsion of gravity.

Dollard aimed the hard toe of his metallic shoe and kicked him viciously in the temple. Garth's body did not stir.

"I would have liked an engine-to-mechanic check very much," Dollard said thoughtfully. "But these things can't always be planned neat enough to meet every detail. There has to be leeway for diversive action—should the situation merit it. In this case, the situation seems to have merited it rather fully."

He began to climb the narrow aluminum rungs of the propped-up

ladder. After reaching the platform, he stood on the grilled support, his fat panting bulk braced against the upper cord of the stabilizer fin. He looked back briefly at Garth's unconscious form on the ground.

"You were a fool, Garth! A fool to believe that I would take you along with me—to share a new empire. Know when I lost complete respect for your intelligence? It was when you banked that past services for me would assure you of future salvation. Very stupid. Didn't you know your usefulness would end for me the moment I left Terra? Why should I have dragged you along to drink up my oxygen, eat my food . . . and undermine me later on? No, friend Garth, you were—all along—just as much a tool as those uniformed carcasses you poisoned on my behalf. May you join them in the sad reflection they must now be experiencing. . . ."

Garth's paralyzed body lay still.

Dollard pressed against the outer panel of the hatch and stepped into the opening that was made by the sliding section. He disappeared into the bowels of the ship, and the hatch closed after him.

A few seconds later, a rumbling inside announced the vessel's engines had come to life. Stubby atmospheric wings unfolded into place on the shining metal sides. Rocket vents below the scorched tail surface began to glow a cherry red as fused gases bit into the pitted

ground. The ship's entire length trembled slightly as it left the surface. Climbing into the blue with an ever-increasing *whoosh*, it described an arc over the jagged peaks and vanished.

ANOTHER half hour passed, before the cataleptic effect of the stunner eased sufficiently for Garth to sit up and rest his chest and arms upon his knees. He rubbed his forehead, felt the bruise at his temple and gazed speculatively at the sky. Then, he studied the bubbling earth only a few feet away from him and realized how close he had been to death from the space vessel's backblasts. He shuddered a moment.

After his head cleared, he struggled to his feet and walked over the damp grass to the work shack. Entering, he searched through a chemical cabinet until he found the vials he wanted. From them, he compounded a liquid mixture which he forced into the ampoule of a hypodermic needle.

When he stepped outside again, he saw the sky had darkened quickly with evening. He walked over to the stricken mechanics and administered an injection into the neck muscles of each man. The counter-toxin took hold, speedily erasing the depressant effect of the drug. Garth had originally fed the men—a non-fatal dosage of an irritant similar to the one Dollard had ordered be used to slay them.

He'd supervised a lot of Dollard's

underhanded work for him, Garth told himself as he waited for the hypo stimulant to react. But murdering helpless men had been something he had rebelled at. And now that Dollard had deserted him, at least he would have company on Terra during his last days of life. It was an outcome Garth had anticipated, although he had been unable to predict just when Dollard would launch his surprise attack.

The men came to sluggishly, their reactions pathetic and confused. The first thing they appeared to notice when their conscious minds took hold of their environment was the empty circle of terrain where the space yacht had formerly stood.

"Dollard took off," Garth explained. "He drugged us all, after we'd gotten the vessel in shape for him."

"The dirty swine—he promised he'd take us!" the men protested.

"Like so many other promises he never intended to keep," said Garth. "He told you men—for instance—the ship was headed for Luna. Me, he told, he was bound for Venus. I think his destination is Venus, but he'll never get there."

"Not get there—why?"

"Because of a little secret I never let him know," Garth replied, rubbing his nose and grinning wryly. "My wife is on Venus, where the plague can't reach her. And I promised myself days ago that Dollard should never be given the opportunity to infect that planet.

That's one promise that has been kept. At least, I know now that Ellen will be safe—for a while longer."

"But, sir, the big boss has gone! What can you do—with him flown the coop?"

"Do now? I've already done it. Dollard thought of me as a fool, but instead—I've shown him up as the real fool. A simpleton, tricked by carelessness. There's a damned big surprise waiting for him in space."

Garth looked up into the twilight sky where a few brilliant stars were now shining. His face bore an expression of exultant triumph. "Yes," he said softly, "a real surprise is just around the next curve for you, Edwin Dollard. I hope you enjoy it as well as you've enjoyed buying and selling men's souls . . ."

FIVE hundred miles above the sun-mirroring Pacific Ocean, Dollard wiped great beads of perspiration from his shiny jowls. His thick hands tugged and wrestled with stubborn knobs that finally yielded, enabling him to apply greater thrust to his stern rockets.

From the moment of takeoff, it had seemed to him that the grim bowl of Terra below him was taking a bigger bite out of his acceleration than it should. Naturally, he hadn't expected his craft to operate with one hundred per cent efficiency, considering the caliber of the tech-

nical help employed on its refitting; but still, his *tau* curve should have brought him to his first coasting point four or five minutes earlier.

By virtue of being his own pilot, he was obliged to astrogate by rule-of-thumb and occasional directive spurts from the course-calculator. If mechanical troubles piled on top of him, now, he'd have to surrender control to his gyromatic pilot, while he moved aft to track down the power-robbing malfunction. No mean task, armed in this case only with a slide rule and what engineering knowledge remained to him after thirty years of high finance.

Whatever the gremlin was, it wasn't exactly an auspicious start for a fifty million-mile hop. He grunted and pressed his secondary firing buttons, boosting space velocity by a percentage that should shake the kinks out.

At the four thousand-mile mark, the earth had retreated to a green ball that floated atop a stream of unbearably bright stars. From this height above the planet's surface, not even the most powerful telescope would have revealed the scenes of rampant disease and flaming destruction being enacted on the broad continents below.

The entire vessel shook in a kind of bone-cracking vibration, lurching and lumbering as if some malign influence had tampered with every rivet and seam-weld in her plates.

More apprehensive than ever, Dollard finally yielded to his fears

and surrendered his controls to the robot pilot. His huge body rendered almost weightless, he pulled himself along the rail guards of a catwalk that led to the unmanned engine room. Here he inspected every instrument dial to be found although the readings on many of them were repeated on duplicates in the bow.

It was then, while the ship was still a thousand miles from the no-pull point where free-wheeling alone had been known to carry vessels out of Terra's gravitational range and into Venus' orbit, that disaster struck. The fuel being fed to exactly half of the rocket tubes choked out, and the blast from the remaining tubes increased proportionately.

Under this new impetus, the vessel's frame shuddered. Its nose suddenly described a wild arc among the gyrating stars. The diversion of inertia was a more severe blow than a meteor collision would have been. Thrust was an exceedingly difficult thing to plot in free space. Dollard, screaming in panic, was flung against a network of metal braces; despite his weightlessness, his mass was great as ever and a sharp steel corner gouged a deep bleeding slash in his puffy cheek. Sickened, he crawled forward through the spinning ship until he was once more able to pull himself up into the pilot's chair.

There, he discovered the second battery of tubes had ceased firing about a minute after the first. But

the changed vectors had already done their damage to both ship and heading.

A QUICK run-through on the course-calculator soon revealed to Dollard how desperate his position was. Mathematically, Venus was now a goal impossible to attain. To re-correct his altered heading would require more fuel than his tanks had carried at take-off, thanks to sabotage. He also had the vast gravitational field of the sun to battle—a powerful sucking force, which if left to work its will could grow insidiously from a gentle tug of a few millimeters per second to a powerful acceleration eighty times terrestrial escape velocity—and this, without ever once relinquishing its hold on the slightest particle of mass in its grip.

Cursing and fuming, Dollard plotted and re-plotted, some of the rustiness of his brain wearing off as he matched his wits against the prospect of death by holocaust. But, all the resources of higher mathematics failed to point toward a solution. An artery commenced to throb painfully above his ear.

It was Garth who had engineered this hideous accident, he told himself. The faithful unsuspecting Garth had turned out to be a traitor. He was the one who had rigged the fuel lines so that at a certain predicted point along the course the flow along one set of conduits would be shunted to the

other.

He should have killed Garth instead of merely stunning him, Dollard thought angrily.

For the twentieth time, he fed three-body calculations into the astro-computer. Somehow, somewhere, in the maze of the Newtonian science there had to be an answer. The complexities of force and heading analysis weren't so great but what machinery could eventually solve all the variables involved. That is, if only Sol's overwhelming gravitational attraction didn't provide a free-sliding path to hell with no choice of alternates in the meanwhile . . .

The *click-click* of the tape as it emerged from the electronic calculator seemed to present a different rhythm to Dollard's ears on the twenty-first try. Picking up the ribbon, he let his reddened eyes run over the printed symbols, translating them into finished equations. Elation suddenly sent his blood-pressure soaring, as the meaning of what he read became apparent. There was a solution . . . a course he could follow! One, which while it would not guide him to Venus, would prevent him from plunging into the sun.

Eagerly, he punched the figures for the heading onto a magnetized wire that would be fed into the gyropilot. After the heading was set, he crawled toward the ship's stern, dragging with him a hydrojet welding torch, a tool that could sear metal apart or join it by causing

regulation of the molten rod protruding from its spring barrel. In the abdomen of the vessel, he found the wrecked fuel lines and removed the obstruction Garth had set up, repairing the channels.

RETURNING to the pilot chamber, he pressed the firing button and acceleration returned a form of gravity to the ship's interior, giving him weight for the first time since the freakish accident.

Sighing with relief as the heavens slowly rotated in his screen, Dollard slumped back in his chair. He punched new figures into the computer, thinking . . . now once safely back into a no-pull zone, a man with a little luck should be able to make—

His chunky fingers froze to the keys. There was another flaw to be dealt with. The discrepancy was one the course-calculator had clearly pointed out, but he had overlooked it in his haste to get underway. The solution he had followed was the only possible one—that was still quite true. But, use of it only plunged him into a second predicament.

This new course, said the equations, a course which would require all the remaining fuel to maintain, would steer the ship into a permanent orbit around the earth—an ellipse with the point of apogee far beyond Luna. He now had the certainty of continued life—for a few more days, until his provisions gave

out . . .

Again he cursed the name of Garth. But for the man's treachery he would be well on his way to Venus. Now, he was a helpless trapped mass of protoplasm, protected from his bitter airless environment only by the same steel walls of the cage that held him . . .

THROUGHOUT the next twenty-four hours, as the nature of the elliptical orbit he had entered became more and more apparent, Dollard fought off sleep while his frightened brain racked and racked again its scattered fund of knowledge for an answer to the new problem.

But at last, the narcosis of cellular exhaustion completely overcame him and he slept.

When he awoke, he was chilled and hungry. The ship had passed into the shadow of Luna and its bulkheads no longer conducted heat to the convecting air envelope inside from the outer plates, generally warmed by solar radiations. It took him sometime to get warm again.

He pondered anew his predicament. It would be useless to plead for help to the Terran space authorities. All interplanetary flights had been grounded since the Asiatics had scattered the epidemic over the western world only to have it re-invade their own borders; all the national governments were fighting rebellion and plague simultaneous-

ly, and most important of all as far as Dollard was concerned, he had effectively outlawed himself from the jurisdiction of all governments by his acts of murder and his treason in fleeing Terra. No, there could be no help from the officials of earth.

Not in present years anyhow, he thought. But, wait! Suppose this plague should ultimately die out or be conquered. Then, wouldn't space travel be resumed? If not by the human race, by its successor—whichever race or species, if such could happen, that mutated successfully enough to produce a plague resistant strain and then evolved a rational brain.

Civilizations rose and toppled in cycles, he knew. Sometime in the near future or even the far future, another civilization would emerge on Terra and another race would conquer the stars.

But what value was that to him, if he would die in a few days from lack of oxygen?

No, if he were to be rescued, it had to be soon. By the Venusian colonists? No hope lay there, either. The second planet was an infant world, and its people—even if they succeeded in making space travel common—would be apt to avoid the Earth-Luna system like the—

He choked: There was no other word for it—like the plague . . .

Again, he was conscious of his brief chill. It aroused some elusive

connection in his brain with a piece of information he had nearly forgotten. What was it? Cerebration set in, as he sought to pin down the clue he wanted. . . . He felt his body chilling . . .

Chilling, he thought. That was it, *deep freezing*.

What cold was colder than the eternal absolute zero of outer space? Where could a person find temperatures lower than those in the celestial icebox that extended everywhere around him? Just outside his port window lurked enough chill to keep his body intact for a million years!

And in a million years, who knew what cultures would learn to pilot vessels through space and come his way to revive him? Possibly alien cultures whom his superior genius for organizing would enable him to dominate. Already, the contemplation of such a possibility rendered the prospect so alluring he wondered why he was holding back. Why not step out of the airlock immediately?

IT was calm reasoning that deterred him, the realization that if his scheme for survival were to meet success, he would have to lay his plans deep enough to meet every contingent possibility.

Two things became immediately apparent as essential: (1) He would have to adopt a method of self-freezing that would assure instantaneous cessation of his life activities without injuring his body cells

by converting the water to ice. (2) He would have to leave behind him an explanation of what he had done and sufficient directions concerning his revivification that he would not be restored so slowly as to alter his molecular structure, a turn of affairs which would in fact make him unalterably dead long before he approached normal body warmth.

Now, thoroughly aroused by the possibility of escaping total death, Edwin Dollard fought his way back through the damaged compartments to the tuberoom. Here were vats of liquid helium, used in Collins engines to refrigerate the volatile rocket fuel. The helium, Dollard knew, was in turn kept super-cool by contact with magnetic salts, mostly iron ammonium sulphate, the magnetic field being generated by the ship's auxiliary dynamos when in operation, the ship's batteries at other times.

But if one were to open all ports or hatches, allowing the atmosphere to escape, the absolute zero space would infiltrate the ship's interior making it unnecessary for either the helium to cool the fuel, or the salts to cool the helium. All would probably approach a state of absolute heat death. And the body of a man, immersed in the helium vat, would be preserved for eternity!

Dollard laughed. He would defy Garth yet!

He spent the following day in the most efficient of preparations. Moving about the ship, he posted com-

plete directions for his recovery in as many languages as he knew. Then, he drew with painstaking care a series of diagrams that repeated the information in pictograph form. Finally he recorded directions on sound tape and hooked the reproducer to an electron eye so it would commence to play the moment the vessel was entered.

This task completed, he set about to prepare his own body. It was imperative that the suspension take place so speedily that none of the animal heat was retained. For this purpose, he imbibed a heavy amount of alcohol which served to flush his capillaries and distribute calories more equally through his system.

Next, he gathered wiring and rigged up a remote-control board that would enable him to open the ship's hatches from sanctuary inside the tuberoom. When finally ready, he stood by the helium vats, opened a switch on the jerry-built board and listened to the vessel's atmospheric envelope swoosh out in the passages just beyond the sealed tuberoom hatch.

Now, the only air remaining inside the craft was that in the tuberoom itself.

At that moment, the ship circling the mother planet entered the shadow of Terra and chilled perceptibly in the absence of radiated sunlight.

Dollard stripped to his skin. His lips were blue and his limbs were trembling, despite their cushion of

fat. He pressed the last button and the pressure inside the room commenced to drop. He stood by the largest vat until all the oxygen was gone, except that remaining in his lungs. The outer hatch swung open, admitting the penetrating cold of complete vacuum.

The trapped industrialist exhaled his breath, counted three and dived into the tank.

His body sank and the atoms of helium temporarily left their random state with the influx of heat, but returned quickly as the magnetic field took up the slack, vaporizing the ammonium salts. All was quiet again—

The human brain and the secondary laws of thermodynamics had combined to thwart the will of a relentless universe.

Edwin Dollard, financial genius and murderer in his time, had entered into a state of suspended animation from which only an equal intelligence could ever awaken him.

THE planets and their satellites revolved in their orbits for uncounted centuries, until even the fixed stars shifted and formed new constellations. During this long almost interminable period, no man-made vessels disturbed the equilibrium between the worlds; no man-made radiations penetrated the empty spaces of the solar system. A wanderer from Procyon or Sirius, entering the neighborhood of Sol, might well have suspected he had

found nine lifeless spheres pursuing a futile and purposeless course about their flaming parent.

So immutable however are the laws of celestial mechanics, once set into operation, that Dollard's ship varied not a centimeter in its elliptical path during those endless dragging years.

But organic life, by its very definition, is highly viable, highly persistent; it is capable of protracted existence in such diverse environments as the imbedded hearts of meteors or the currents of briny polar seas. It is likewise capable of infinite modifications under stress, such as glacial flow, cessation of moisture, loss of sunlight . . . or, the rampant onslaught of bacterial disease.

Hardest of all forms of life, as proved in the last days of the reptilian age, are the carnivorous mammalian orders; these members are generally the most adaptable, intelligent and ubiquitous of living types. And by their conquest of their stubborn environment, they have proven themselves equally the fiercest.

Thus, it was not surprising that eventually the derelict spaces between the inner planet of Sol were once again the scene of traffic; not bristling traffic perhaps, but sufficient to present concrete proof a new intelligent race had developed on Terra.

Nor was it anymore surprising to Edwin Dollard, when Dollard awoke, aroused from his long sleep

—and conscious in the passage of time of no more than a second's absence from the world of sense and light—that this life should have found him.

He awoke, aware of stinging pain in his eyelids and the jabbing of a thousand needles below the surface of his skin. A glaring white bulb, suspended in an ice-blue ceiling, dug into his pupils with relentless intensity.

A voice, couched in a low-throated growl, spoke just above his ear in an unintelligible language. A second voice, farther away, answered with a guttural purring.

Dollard slowly revolved his field of vision until it rested upon the first creature who had spoken. His eyes made out a man-like apparition in a white smock buttoned to a metal harness, a tall, lithe figure whose curiously pointed face regarded him with unblinking interest.

"You are come to, I notice," the creature said, employing a rasping, blurred form of English. "I am Shir K'han, of the people of Tegur, detailed to interpret your meager tongue, oh frozen primate."

"You're not human . . . but at least you're intelligent," Dollard snorted. "Where am I?"

"On board a vessel of the Tegurian fleet, bound for the home planet."

"Which one do you call 'home'?"

For reply, Shir K'han gestured towards a bulkhead paneling at the far end of the room. Dollard's eyes

focussed on a trimensional photo-mural of Terra. In the representation, the continental outlines of the planet were the same; but if the colors were reproduced accurately, then the earth had lost the bulk of its polar cap and become a tropical world. The Sahara was a verdant green, while a great portion of the Amazon valley was inundated by bluish seas.

DOLLARD attempted to sit up; the struggle was what first caused him to notice his nude body was strapped by polished steel clamps to a long flat porcelain table. Rolling his head to one side, he discovered that the table's rim contained a long shallow trough which had not been scoured too clean. Deepening stains remained of whosever blood it was that had been contributed from the last autopsy performed on the surface of the table.

"Why'm I tied up?" Dollard demanded.

"A temporary precaution," Shir K'han replied, soothingly. The growl of his voice had now reduced itself to a monotonous purr, which reminded Dollard of nothing so much as a . . . but then, he shook his head: No! that couldn't be. Mankind replaced by a thinking species of biped felines—descended from a race of giant jungle cats. The development was fantastic.

"Precaution?" Dollard repeated.

"You might have become violent,

primate. Only a few anthropoids are extant, now. And They are scraggly skulkers, hiding out in the brush of the second planet — the world you knew as Venus. But even so, many of them have been known to react quite viciously when captured."

"Then, there are humans left?"

"I see you recognize the difference between our race and yours at once." Shir K'han stiffened with pride. "The gap is quite great."

Dollard noticed a very faint striped pattern could be traced in the fuzzy growth on Shir K'han's bared arms.

"Yes, some members of the previous culture do survive," the feline continued. "Puny specimens. We have been forced to hunt them down. Unfortunately, they breed slowly."

"I claim no kinship with them," said Dollard. "If you're sniffing around in an effort to find out my sentiments about that, you can stop right now. As a man from the past, I'm strictly for myself." He winked. "What's more, I never did believe that monkey business. You know, about the human race being the only kind of life having souls or intelligence."

"Strange words . . . from a primate."

"That's what I say. You look good enough to me. You have an adequate IQ—that's the only test you need to pass with me. Now, how about getting these clamps off

of me?"

Dollard's renewed request incited no action. The feline interpreter's pointed features were impassive; only the pricked attitude of his tufted ears indicated he was listening.

"Let's go," Dollard cajoled. "You've—revived me—and I think I've proved I'm not dangerous."

"You still do not seem to understand. Your animation from the frozen sleep was undertaken solely because it was a challenge to our science that we could not over-look."

"And a bang-up job you did of it. Followed my directions perfectly."

"We used our own methods," Shir K'han corrected.

"The idea was mine."

"True, but had you known it, there did exist a mathematical solution to your problem of escaping from the fixed orbit your ship adopted. Apparently, to your misfortune, your training failed to include a knowledge of five-body equations . . . so you never arrived at the proper heading you needed to take."

"Naturally, not," the revived industrialist snapped in answer. "But that couldn't be helped. I never professed to be a super-competent astrologer. In my world, in my time, I was a leader of my race—a builder of factories and machines."

"Our archeologists have dug into the ruins of your civilization—without, however, a great deal of curiosity," said Shir K'han coldly. "We found little in it to interest us. We

have translated your language—but even so, we uncovered nothing to equal even the barest rudiments of our own science. Our zoologists dismiss you as extra-clever primates—possessed of some knacks, but nowhere on a reasoning, perspicuous level.”

“But that’s absurd—”

“From our point of view, no. In fact, we still debate whether you primates could have been intelligent enough to have founded your culture without the aid of some early Tegurians. We Tegurians have been superior to the anthropoids as far back as our own history goes, which is to the days of the Great Impetus—the epoch when our race was gifted with great powers and the primates degenerated.”

“Nonsense,” scoffed Edwin Dollard. “Get me off this sadistic table—and I’ll demonstrate how smart I am.” He squinted, studying the feline’s high-domed head and furry chin.

“Now, I’ve got you pegged,” he went on. “You’re just a specimen of what a jacked-up tiger would turn out to be, burned under a few million volts of hard radiation. You may be civilized, you and your people—but I bet it took you a million years of high-speed evolution to do it. If it hadn’t been for mankind’s work with mutable bacteria, you’d still be chasing your tails under the palm trees—”

SHIR K’han interrupted him, remarking: “The art of vituper-

ation and scolding always was a characteristic of the various simian species. We have an apt axiom among the people of Tegur. It might be translated: ‘Chattering man, empty brain pan.’”

At that moment, it occurred to Dollard he was pressing his initial luck too far. No use antagonizing present company.

“All right. I know when I’m bucking the system too hard,” he replied cagily. “What *do* you intend to do with me?”

For answer, the interpreter turned to the second Tegurian in the room, a creature who had stood motionless near the only exit, and uttered a flow of guttural syllables, climaxed by a high-pitched questioning note. The reply was forthcoming almost immediately, spoken in weightier, more deliberate tones.

“The commander says you are to be presented to the leaders of our civilization,” Shir K’han reported. “That’ll take place when we dock at the home planet in a few hours. In the meanwhile, you may have the run of the ship.”

The feline pushed down a knobbed lever and the steel clamps slid from Dollard’s trussed form. His relief matched only by his quickened awareness of the need for caution in dealing further with his rescuers, Dollard took advantage of his release to stretch his aching muscles.

Standing erect caused him a moment’s dizziness, which he could not account for until he recalled that the

alcohol he had drunk thousands (or was it millions?) of years previously still remained in his bloodstream.

Although the interior of the Tegurian ship was suffocatingly warm, yet Dollard felt the lack of clothing with what amounted to discomfort. He described his feeling to Shir K'han who told him his apparel had also been found in the circling space yacht. Equally well-preserved by the cold of interplanetary space, the clothes would be brought to him immediately.

After garbing himself, Dollard strolled about the Tegurian vessel. Its alien constructure seemed to defy all the architectural principles familiar to a human's primate mind. Catwalks, especially, lived up fully to their name, appearing as mere unsupported ribbons that stretched across banks of throbbing molecular engines. Mechanics traversed these walks over fuel pits with graceful skill, despite the lack of handholds. Everywhere, Dollard noticed that members of the crew, when relieved of their tasks, immediately dropped off to slumber without need of intervening recreation.

Slightly less than six hours after he was awakened, Edwin Dollard heard whistles scream through the length of the vessel announcing planetfall would take place in only a few minutes.

Shir K'han padded up to his side and informed him that he would have to rest in a padded cell while the landing took place. The mus-

cles of his human body would not be up to the shock of deceleration—a magnified strain to which feline muscles had long been accustomed.

Dollard obeyed. By now he was weary of his confinement aboard. He was anxious to get aground where he should meet the true leaders of Tegur. He could impress *them* with his superior abilities. Of course, it would seem strange to find Terra ruled by another species, but after all that was a contingency he had fully considered when he voluntarily undertook the deepfreeze. Little by little, the first shock of encountering an alien culture seemed to be wearing off—yet he knew there were still many mind-twisting problems to face.

Shortly after he had braced himself against the sponge-lined bulkheads, a great shock travelled transversely through the ship, followed by a dozen or more lesser shudders. Metal groaned and creaked all about him, and the room temperature noticeably increased.

LEFT to himself, Dollard immediately began to formulate new plans. Searching his garments, he was relieved to find a pocket still contained the bag of glittering Syrtis diamonds with which he had hoped long ago to bribe Venusian officials. The gems might prove equally useful now in cementing his position with the Tegurians. He was angered however to find his flame pistols and stunner had been taken

away from him.

He decided that immediately after his presentation to the leaders, he would ask for the privilege of inspecting their factories and other technological facilities. There had never been erected an industrial plant yet, whose efficiency couldn't in some way be improved, Dollard knew.

By making himself practicably useful, Dollard knew that in time he could build up a personal organization that eventually would result in the acquisition of a new financial empire.

All of course hinged upon the very vital conference with the upper echelon of Tegurian rulers.

But, at least it could be said that Edwin Dollard had proved himself capable of dealing with fortune on its toughest terms. Now, he was in the home stretch of his new career.

Seconds after, the Tegurian ship landed with a thunderous jolt. The engine throb died away and silence reigned along the corridors. Dollard found his breath painfully short as renewed anxiety gripped him. This was the crucial moment.

A panel slid open and Shir K'han appeared. "Come," he said. "The leaders have been notified and are waiting at the banquet hall."

"Splendid," said Dollard, rubbing his hands together. "If things work out to advantage for me, I'll remember you, Shir K'han."

The Tegurian's yellow eyes blinked as if he had not heard.

Outside, Dollard's lungs expanded to draw in deep gulps of the luxuriant tropical air that characterized a warmer Terra. At a considerable distance from the nearly deserted spaceport, he saw that a brilliant city of high towers capped by narrow glass spires raised its shining structures to the sky. The sharp-pointed buildings could be seen to be interlaced with countless spidery cables and glistening bridges.

For Dollard's observing eyes, the vista of the metropolis evoked—by some indefinable ancient suggestiveness—a buried Terran memory of a giant banyan tree pierced by lean striped bamboos.

"Bengul, our capital," Shir K'han told him. "This way, now." He pointed to a waiting air vehicle on the lonely drome. "In there—and you'll only have five more minutes." The feline nostrils wrinkled.

"Five more minutes?" said Dollard. "Aren't you going?"

"No, I wasn't invited."

"I'm to go alone?"

"Yes," Shir K'han replied. The prolonged effort of speaking in a strange tongue was reflected in his increasingly roughened tones. "I've been ordered to put you in the cage-flier. Then, my job is done. The cage will transfer you to the leaders' quarters—where all else will be done. Farewell, primate. It has been interesting. I could almost swear that . . ."

He paused.

"Something troubling you?" said

Dollard, who didn't usually concern himself with other persons' inner disturbances. He wondered now what instinct prompted this particular inquiry of solicitude on his part.

"You trouble me," replied Shir K'hàn. "I would almost swear you had . . . a high intelligence . . . and a soul worthy of a Tegurian. But, of course, I know that isn't so."

"That's not what I meant," Dollard said, fretfully. "There's something else—" For a moment, he felt like screaming. "—something you haven't told me."

"Would you really like to know?" said Shir K'hàn. "I had thought it was better you didn't. But, then I have often been accused of strange sympathies for a Tegurian—"

"I demand to know."

"Then, I must hurry. Only a few minutes remain. Let me try to draw you a mental picture, primate. Your race, like ours, was carnivorous. You feasted on many delicacies—on species extinct like the steer, the pheasant, the squirrel. It was your very nature, your undeniable primal instincts, that made you enjoy the rending and devouring of flesh—"

"True," admitted Dollard. His body was now trembling.

"I remember," continued Shir K'hàn, "one of our archeologists translated an account of how the primates of your time unearthed the body of a mastodon, buried in the glacial ice. The mastodon flesh, a delicacy, was so well-preserved that it was still edible. And so, it was

eaten."

"I—I don't think I understand what you're getting at," declared Dollard.

HE looked anxiously about him, but the flat plain bore no shelter—or for that matter, no other objects save the waiting air vehicle and the recently-landed space ship on the drôme. Lights began to glow in the far-off city.

"The point is," said the feline interpreter, "that it would have made no difference to the primates had the mastodon been intelligent. They would have eaten him anyway. In your epoch, primates ate many domestic animals who differed less in intelligence quotient from them than differ civilized Tegurians from human primates like yourself . . . the gap today is much greater . . ."

"Then, you—"

"Not me. Only the leaders of my world, shall I say. By virtue of their exalted rank, they have the right to the choicest of foods. Since the dawn of our history, the flesh of primates has been our greatest delicacy—but it has grown scarcer and scarcer, until now it is virtually non-existent. And such specimens, as are trapped, are stringy and barely edible."

Dollard looked down guiltily at his own plump body. His face bore the flushed expression of one suddenly conscious of sin.

"But you," continued Shir K'hàn,

"your body is fat and well-preserved. When we found you on your derelict ship, our commander communicated with the rulers of Tegur immediately. He was ordered to change course and bring you to Bengul—"

The feline's speech broke off. Edwin Dollard had suddenly commenced to run from the horror of this alien world, recognition of his fate having burst like a rocket in his panic-stricken mind. His heart was pounding.

But loping easily, along as his ancestors might have pursued a baboon or antelope, Shir K'han overtook the screaming human. He seized his obese bulk by the waist and lifted him high above his head. While Dollard kicked and moaned, the feline bore him back to the air vehicle and deposited him in a wire mesh cage in the flying craft's cockpit. A tangle of the sticky ropes descended from the cage's roof, further entangling the trapped industrialist and serving to reduce him to helplessness.

Shir K'han adjusted knobs and

switches on the vehicle's control board, until he had produced the desired setting. Then, he stepped back.

"As I said before," he declared "this vehicle will automatically transport you to the leaders' banquet hall—to arrive in five minutes. There, you will be prepared and presented to our rulers. I hope you please them. The reward for our commander and his crew will be great."

"Then, all along, what you've been trying to tell me is: . . . is that. . . I'm to be—"

The remainder of Dollard's words melted into a jumble of gibberish.

"Exactly," confirmed the Tegurian, walking away from the vehicle. If the creature's feline countenance showed a trace of conscience, Dollard from his position within the rising cage could not discern it—not that it particularly mattered in his last moment of sanity on earth.

And it would puzzle Shir K'han for many years just why the last shrill scream of the primate was: "Garth—Garth, you did this to me!"

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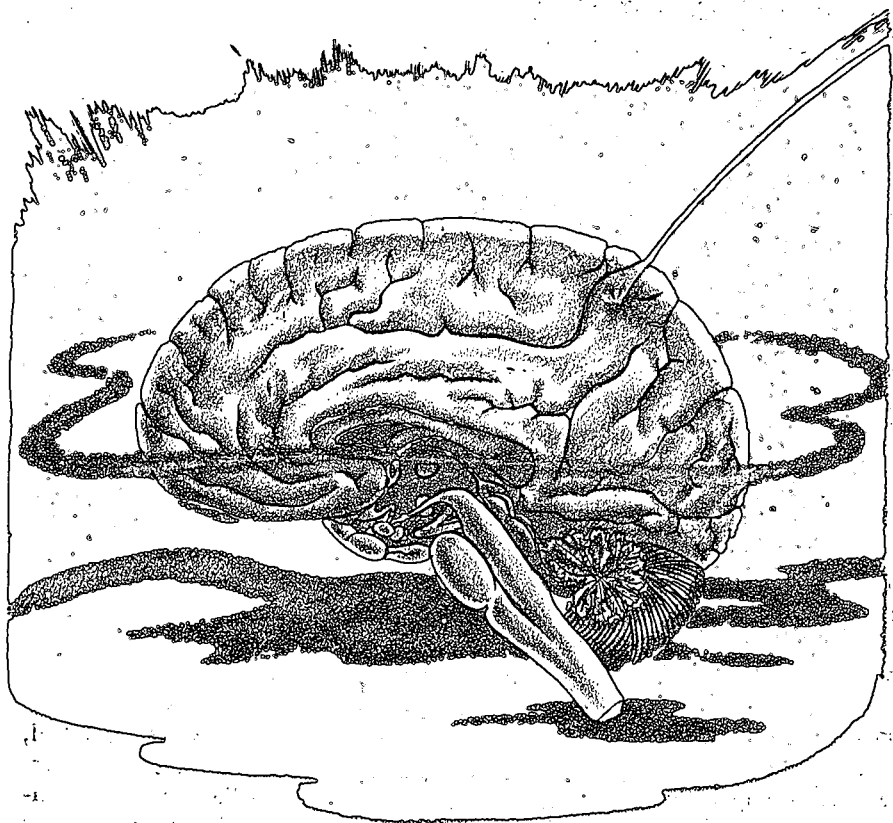
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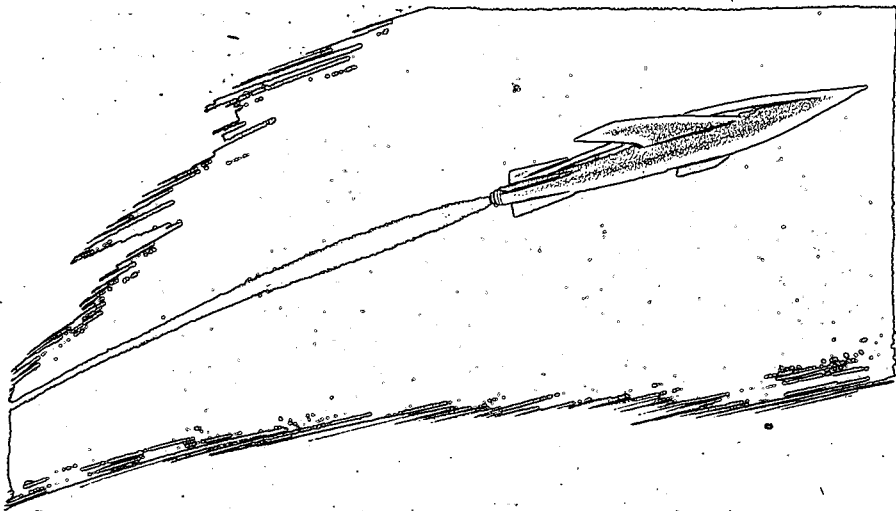
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Mr. Spaceship

By

Philip K. Dick





KRAMER leaned back. "You can see the situation. How can we deal with a factor like this? The perfect variable."

"Perfect? Prediction should still be possible. A living thing still acts from necessity, the same as inanimate material. But the cause-effect chain is more subtle; there are more factors to be considered. The difference is quantitative, I think. The reaction of the living organism parallels natural causation, but with greater complexity."

Gross and Kramer looked up at the board plates, suspended on the wall, still dripping, the images hardening into place. Kramer traced a line with his pencil.

"See that? It's a pseudopodium. They're alive, and so far, a weapon we can't beat. No mechanical system can compete with that, simple or intricate. We'll have to scrap

the Johnson Control and find something else."

"Meanwhile the war continues as it is. Stalemate. Checkmate. They can't get to us, and we can't get through their living minefield."

Kramer nodded. "It's a perfect defense, for them. But there still might be one answer."

"What's that?"

"Wait a minute." Kramer turned to his rocket expert, sitting with the charts and files. "The heavy cruiser that returned this week. It didn't actually touch, did it? It came close but there was no contact."

"Correct." The expert nodded. "The mine was twenty miles off. The cruiser was in space-drive, moving directly toward Proxima, line-straight, using the Johnson Control, of course. It had deflected a quarter of an hour earlier for reasons unknown. Later it resumed its

course. That was when they got it."

"It shifted," Kramer said. "But not enough. The mine was coming along after it, trailing it. It's the same old story, but I wonder about the contact."

"Here's our theory," the expert said. "We keep looking for contact, a trigger in the pseudopodium. But more likely we're witnessing a psychological phenomena, a decision without any physical correlative. We're watching for something that isn't there. The mine *decides* to blow up. It sees our ship, approaches, and then decides."

"Thanks." Kramer turned to Gross. "Well, that confirms what I'm saying. How can a ship guided by automatic relays escape a mine that decides to explode? The whole theory of mine penetration is that you must avoid tripping the trigger. But here the trigger is a state of mind in a complicated, developed life-form."

"The belt is fifty thousand miles deep," Gross added. "It solves another problem for them, repair and maintenance. The damn things reproduce, fill up the spaces by spawning into them. I wonder what they feed on?"

"Probably the remains of our first-line. The big cruisers must be a delicacy. It's a game of wits, between a living creature and a ship piloted by automatic relays. The ship always loses." Kramer opened a folder. "I'll tell you what I suggest."

"Go on," Gross said. "I've already heard ten solutions today. What's yours?"

"Mine is very simple. These creatures are superior to any mechanical system, but only because they're alive. Almost any other life-form could compete with them, any higher life-form. If the yuks can put out living mines to protect their planets, we ought to be able to harness some of our own life-forms in a similar way. Let's make use of the same weapon ourselves."

"Which life-form do you propose to use?"

"I think the human brain is the most agile of known living forms. Do you know of any better?"

"But no human being can withstand outspace travel. A human pilot would be dead of heart failure long before the ship got anywhere near Proxima."

"But we don't need the whole body," Kramer said. "We need only the brain."

"What?"

"The problem is to find a person of high intelligence who would contribute, in the same manner that eyes and arms are volunteered."

"But a brain . . ."

"Technically, it could be done. Brains have been transferred several times, when body destruction made it necessary. Of course, to a spaceship, to a heavy outspace cruiser, instead of an artificial body, that's new."

The room was silent.

"It's quite an idea," Gross said

slowly. His heavy square face twisted. "But even supposing it might work, the big question is *whose* brain?"

IT was all very confusing, the reasons for the war, the nature of the enemy. The Yucconae had been contacted on one of the outlying planets of Proxima Centauri. At the approach of the Terran ship, a host of dark slim pencils had lifted abruptly and shot off into the distance. The first real encounter came between three of the yuk pencils and a single exploration ship from Terra. No terrans survived. After that it was all out war, with no holds barred.

Both sides feverishly constructed defense rings around their systems. Of the two, the Yucconae belt was the better. The ring around Proxima was a living ring, superior to anything Terra could throw against it. The standard equipment by which Terran ships were guided in outspace, the Johnson Control, was not adequate. Something more was needed. Automatic relays were not good enough.

—Not good at all, Kramer thought to himself, as he stood looking down the hillside at the work going on below him. A warm wind blew along the hill, rustling the weeds and grass. At the bottom, in the valley, the mechanics had almost finished; the last elements of the reflex system had been removed from the ship and crated up.

All that was needed now was the new core, the new central key that would take the place of the mechanical system. A human brain, the brain of an intelligent, wary human being. But would the human being part with it? That was the problem.

Kramer turned. Two people were approaching him along the road, a man and a woman. The man was Gross, expressionless, heavy-set, walking with dignity. The woman was — He stared in surprise and growing annoyance. It was Dolores, his wife. Since they'd separated he had seen little of her . . .

"Kramer," Gross said. "Look who I ran into. Come back down with us. We're going into town."

"Hello, Phil," Dolores said. "Well, aren't you glad to see me?" — He nodded. "How have you been? You're looking fine." She was still pretty and slender in her uniform, the blue-grey of Internal Security, Gross' organization.

"Thanks." She smiled. "You seem to be doing all right, too. Commander Gross tells me that you're responsible for this project, Operation Head, as they call it. Whose head have you decided on?"

"That's the problem." Kramer lit a cigarette. "This ship is to be equipped with a human brain instead of the Johnson system. We've constructed special draining baths for the brain, electronic relays to catch the impulses and magnify them, a continual feeding duct that supplies the living cells with every-

thing they need. But—"

"But we still haven't got the brain itself," Gross finished. They began to walk back toward the car. "If we can get that we'll be ready for the tests."

"Will the brain remain alive?" Dolores asked. "Is it actually going to live as part of the ship?"

"It will be alive, but not conscious. Very little life is actually conscious. Animals, trees, insects are quick in their responses, but they aren't conscious. In this process of ours the individual personality, the ego, will cease. We only need the response ability, nothing more."

Dolores shuddered. "How terrible!"

"In time of war everything must be tried," Kramer said absently. "If one life sacrificed will end the war it's worth it. This ship might get through. A couple more like it and there wouldn't be any more war."

THEY got into the car. As they drove down the road, Gross said, "Have you thought of anyone yet?"

Kramer shook his head. "That's out of my line."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm an engineer. It's not in my department."

"But all this was your idea."

"My work ends there."

Gross was staring at him oddly. Kramer shifted uneasily.

"Then who is supposed to do it?"

Gross said. "I can have my organization prepare examinations of various kinds, to determine fitness, that kind of thing—"

"Listen, Phil," Dolores said suddenly.

"What?"

She turned toward him. "I have an idea. Do you remember that professor we had in college. Michael Thomas?"

Kramer nodded.

"I wonder if he's still alive." Dolores frowned. "If he is he must be awfully old."

"Why, Dolores?" Gross asked.

"Perhaps an old person who didn't have much time left, but whose mind was still clear and sharp—"

"Professor Thomas." Kramer rubbed his jaw. "He certainly was a wise old duck. But could he still be alive? He must have been seventy, then."

"We could find that out," Gross said. "I could make a routine check."

"What do you think?" Dolores said. "If any human mind could outwit those creatures—"

"I don't like the idea," Kramer said. In his mind an image had appeared, the image of an old man sitting behind a desk, his bright gentle eyes moving about the classroom. The old man leaning forward, a thin hand raised—

"Keep him out of this," Kramer said.

"What's wrong?" Gross looked at him curiously.

"It's because I suggested it," Do-

lores said.

"No." Kramer shook his head. "It's not that. I didn't expect anything like this, somebody I knew, a man I studied under. I remember him very clearly. He was a very distinct personality."

"Good," Gross said. "He sounds fine."

"We can't do it. We're asking his death!"

"This is war," Gross said, "and war doesn't wait on the needs of the individual. You said that yourself. Surely he'll volunteer; we can keep it on that basis."

"He may already be dead," Dolores murmured.

"We'll find that out," Gross said speeding up the car. They drove the rest of the way in silence.

FOR a long time the two of them stood studying the small wood house, overgrown with ivy, set back on the lot behind an enormous oak. The little town was silent and sleepy; once in awhile a car moved slowly along the distant highway, but that was all.

"This is the place," Gross said to Kramer. He folded his arms. "Quite a quaint little house."

Kramer said nothing. The two Security Agents behind them were expressionless.

Gross started toward the gate. "Let's go. According to the check he's still alive, but very sick. His mind is agile, however. That seems to be certain. It's said he doesn't leave the house. A woman takes

care of his needs. He's very frail."

They went down the stone walk and up onto the porch. Gross rang the bell. They waited. After a time they heard slow footsteps. The door opened. An elderly woman in a shapeless wrapper studied them impassively.

"Security," Gross said, showing his card. "We wish to see Professor Thomas."

"Why?"

"Government business." He glanced at Kramer.

Kramer stepped forward. "I was a pupil of the Professor's," he said. "I'm sure he won't mind seeing us."

The woman hesitated uncertainly. Gross stepped into the doorway. "All right, mother. This is war time. We can't stand out here."

The two Security agents followed him, and Kramer came reluctantly behind, closing the door. Gross stalked down the hall until he came to an open door. He stopped, looking in. Kramer could see the white corner of a bed, a wooden post and the edge of a dresser.

He joined Gross.

In the dark room a withered old man lay, propped up on endless pillows. At first it seemed as if he were asleep; there was no motion or sign of life. But after a time Kramer saw with a faint shock that the old man was watching them intently, his eyes fixed on them, unmoving, unwinking.

"Professor Thomas?" Gross said. "I'm Commander Gross of Security. This man with me is perhaps known

to you—"

The faded eyes fixed on Kramer.

"I know him. Philip Kramer . . . You've grown heavier, boy." The voice was feeble, the rustle of dry ashes. "Is it true you're married now?"

"Yes. I married Dolores French. You remember her." Kramer came toward the bed. "But we're separated. It didn't work out very well. Our careers—"

"What we came here about, Professor," Gross began, but Kramer cut him off with an impatient wave.

"Let me talk. Can't you and your men get out of here long enough to let me talk to him?"

Gross swallowed. "All right, Kramer." He nodded to the two men. The three of them left the room, going out into the hall and closing the door after them.

The old man in the bed watched Kramer silently. "I don't think much of him," he said at last. "I've seen his type before. What's he want?"

"Nothing. He just came along. Can I sit down?" Kramer found a stiff upright chair beside the bed. "If I'm bothering you—"

"No. I'm glad to see you again, Philip. After so long. I'm sorry your marriage didn't work out."

"How have you been?"

"I've been very ill. I'm afraid that my moment on the world's stage has almost ended." The ancient eyes studied the younger man reflectively. "You look as if you have been . . . ng well. Like every-

one else I thought highly of. You've gone to the top in this society."

Kramer smiled. Then he became serious. "Professor, there's a project we're working on that I want to talk to you about. It's the first ray of hope we've had in this whole war. If it works, we may be able to crack the yuk defenses, get some ships into their system. If we can do that the war might be brought to an end."

"Go on. Tell me about it, if you wish."

"It's a long shot, this project. It may not work at all, but we have to give it a try."

"It's obvious that you came here because of it," Professor Thomas murmured. "I'm becoming curious. Go on."

AFTER Kramer finished the old man lay back in the bed without speaking. At last he sighed.

"I understand. A human mind, taken out of a human body." He sat up a little, looking at Kramer. "I suppose you're thinking of me."

Kramer said nothing.

"Before I make my decision I want to see the papers on this, the theory and outline of construction. I'm not sure I like it. —For reasons of my own, I mean. But I want to look at the material. If you'll do that—"

"Certainly." Kramer stood up and went to the door. Gross and the two Security Agents were standing outside, waiting tensely. "Gross, come inside."

They filed into the room.

"Give the Professor the papers," Kramer said. "He wants to study them before deciding."

Gross brought the file out of his coat pocket, a manila envelope. He handed it to the old man on the bed. "Here it is, Professor. You're welcome to examine it. Will you give us your answer as soon as possible? We're very anxious to begin, of course."

"I'll give you my answer when I've decided." He took the envelope with a thin, trembling hand. "My decision depends on what I find out from these papers. If I don't like what I find, then I will not become involved with this work in any shape or form." He opened the envelope with shaking hands. "I'm looking for one thing."

"What is it?" Gross said.

"That's my affair. Leave me a number by which I can reach you when I've decided."

Silently, Gross put his card down on the dresser. As they went out Professor Thomas was already reading the first of the papers, the outline of the theory.

KRAMER sat across from Dale Winter, his second in line. "What then?" Winter said.

"He's going to contact us." Kramer scratched with a drawing pen on some paper "I don't know what to think."

"What do you mean?" Winter's good-natured face was puzzled.

"Look." Kramer stood up, pacing

back and forth, his hands in his uniform pockets. "He was my teacher in college. I respected him as a man, as well as a teacher. He was more than a voice, a talking book. He was a person, a calm, kindly person I could look up to. I always wanted to be like him, someday. Now look at me."

"So?"

"Look at what I'm asking. I'm asking for his life, as if he were some kind of laboratory animal kept around in a cage, not a man, a teacher at all."

"Do you think he'll do it?"

"I don't know." Kramer went to the window. He stood looking out. "In a way, I hope not."

"But if he doesn't—"

"Then we'll have to find somebody else. I know. There would be somebody else. Why did Dolores have to—"

The vidphone rang. Kramer pressed the button.

"This is Gross." The heavy features formed. "The old man called me. Professor Thomas."

"What did he say?" He knew; he could tell already, by the sound of Gross' voice.

"He said he'd do it. I was a little surprised myself, but apparently he means it. We've already made arrangements for his admission to the hospital. His lawyer is drawing up the statement of liability."

Kramer only half heard. He nodded wearily. "All right. I'm glad. I suppose we can go ahead, then."

"You don't sound very glad."

"I wonder why he decided to go ahead with it."

He was very certain about it." Gross sounded pleased. "He called me quite early. I was still in bed. You know, this calls for a celebration."

"Sure," Kramer said. "It sure does."

TOWARD the middle of August the project neared completion. They stood outside in the hot autumn heat, looking up at the sleek metal sides of the ship.

Gross thumped the metal with his hand. "Well, it won't be long. We can begin the test any time."

"Tell us more about this," an officer in gold braid said. "It's such an unusual concept."

"Is there really a human brain inside the ship?" a dignitary asked, a small man in a rumpled suit. "And the brain is actually alive?"

"Gentlemen, this ship is guided by a living brain instead of the usual Johnson relay-control system. But the brain is not conscious. It will function by reflex only. The practical difference between it and the Johnson system is this: a human brain is far more intricate than any man-made structure, and its ability to adapt itself to a situation, to respond to danger, is far beyond anything that could be artificially built."

Gross paused, cocking his ear. The turbines of the ship were beginning to rumble, shaking the

ground under them with a deep vibration. Kramer was standing a short distance away from the others, his arms folded, watching silently. At the sound of the turbines he walked quickly around the ship to the other side. A few workmen were clearing away the last of the waste, the scraps of wiring and scaffolding. They glanced up at him and went on hurriedly with their work. Kramer mounted the ramp and entered the control cabin of the ship. Winter was sitting at the controls with a Pilot from Space-transport.

"How's it look?" Kramer asked.

"All right." Winter got up. "He tells me that it would be best to take off manually. The robot controls—" Winter hesitated. "I mean, the built-in controls, can take over later on in space."

"That's right," the Pilot said. "It's customary with the Johnson system, and so in this case we should—"

"Can you tell anything yet?" Kramer asked.

"No," the Pilot said slowly. "I don't think so. I've been going over everything. It seems to be in good order. There's only one thing I wanted to ask you about." He put his hand on the control board. "There are some changes here I don't understand."

"Changes?"

"Alterations from the original design. I wonder what the purpose is."

Kramer took a set of the plans

from his coat. "Let me look." He turned the pages over. The Pilot watched carefully over his shoulder.

"The changes aren't indicated on your copy," the Pilot said. "I wonder—" He stopped. Commander Gross had entered the control cabin.

"Gross, who authorized alterations?" Kramer said. "Some of the wiring has been changed."

"Why, your old friend." Gross signaled to the field tower through the window.

"My old friend?"

"The Professor. He took quite an active interest." Gross turned to the Pilot. "Let's get going. We have to take this out past gravity for the test they tell me. Well, perhaps it's for the best. Are you ready?"

"Sure." The Pilot sat down and moved some of the controls around. "Anytime."

"Go ahead, then," Gross said.

"The Professor—" Kramer began, but at that moment there was a tremendous roar and the ship leaped under him. He grasped one of the wall holds and hung on as best he could. The cabin was filling with a steady throbbing, the raging of the jet turbines underneath them.

The ship leaped. Kramer closed his eyes and held his breath. They were moving out into space, gaining speed each moment.

“WELL, what do you think?”
Winter said nervously.

"Is it time yet?"

"A little longer," Kramer said. He was sitting on the floor of the cabin, down by the control wiring. He had removed the metal covering-plate, exposing the complicated maze of relay wiring. He was studying it, comparing it to the wiring diagrams.

"What's the matter? Gross said.

"These changes. I can't figure out what they're for. The only pattern I can make out is that for some reason—"

"Let me look," the Pilot said. He squatted down beside Kramer. "You were saying?"

"See this lead here? Originally it was switch controlled. It closed and opened automatically, according to temperature change. Now it's wired so that the central control system operates it. The same with the others. A lot of this was still mechanical, worked by pressure, temperature, stress. Now it's under the central master."

"The brain?" Gross said. "You mean it's been altered so that the brain manipulates it?"

Kramer nodded. "Maybe Professor Thomas felt that no mechanical relays could be trusted. Maybe he thought that things would be happening too fast. But some of these could close in a split second. The brake rockets could go on as quickly as—"

"Hey," Winter said from the control seat. "We're getting near the moon stations. What'll I do?"
They looked out the port. The

corroded surface of the moon gleamed up at them, a corrupt and sickening sight. They were moving swift toward it.

"I'll take it," the Pilot said. He eased Winter out of the way and strapped himself in place. The ship began to move away from the moon as he manipulated the controls. Down below them they could see the observation stations dotting the surface, and the tiny squares that were the openings of the underground factories and hangars. A red blinker winked up at them and the Pilot's fingers moved on the board in answer.

"We're past the moon," the Pilot said, after a time. The moon had fallen behind them; the ship was heading into outer space. "Well, we can go ahead with it."

Kramer did not answer.

"Mr. Kramer, we can go ahead any time."

Kramer started. "Sorry. I was thinking. All right, thanks." He frowned, deep in thought.

"What it is?" Gross asked.

"The wiring changes. Did you understand the reason for them when you gave the okay to the workmen?"

Gross flushed. "You know I know nothing about technical material. I'm in Security."

"Then you should have consulted me."

"What does it matter?" Gross grinned wryly. "We're going to have to start putting our faith in the old man, sooner or later."

The Pilot stepped back from the

board. His face was pale and set. "Well, it's done," he said. "That's it."

"What's done?" Kramer said.

"We're on automatic. The brain. I turned the board over to it—to him, I mean. The Old Man." The Pilot lit a cigarette and puffed nervously. "Let's keep our fingers crossed."

THE ship was coasting evenly, in the hands of its invisible pilot. Far down inside the ship, carefully armoured and protected, a soft human brain lay in a tank of liquid, a thousand minute electric charges playing over its surface. As the charges rose they were picked up and amplified, fed into relay systems, advanced, carried on through the entire ship—

Gross wiped his forehead nervously. "So *he* is running it, now. I hope he knows what he's doing."

Kramer nodded enigmatically. "I think he does."

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing." Kramer walked to the port. "I see we're still moving in a straight line." He picked up the microphone. "We can instruct the brain orally, through this." He blew against the microphone experimentally.

"Go on," Winter said.

"Bring the ship around half-right," Kramer said. "Decrease speed."

They waited. Time passed. Gross looked at Kramer. "No change. Nothing."

"Wait."

Slowly, the ship was beginning to turn. The turbines missed, reducing their steady beat. The ship was taking up its new course, adjusting itself. Nearby some space debris rushed past, incinerating in the blasts of the turbine jets.

"So far so good," Gross said.

They began to breathe more easily. The invisible pilot had taken control smoothly, calmly. The ship was in good hands. Kramer spoke a few more words into the microphone, and they swung again. Now they were moving back, the way they had come, toward the moon.

"Let's see what he does when we enter the moon's pull," Kramer said. "He was a good mathematician, the old man. He could handle any kind of problem."

The ship veered, turning away from the moon. The great eaten-away globe fell behind them.

Gross breathed a sigh of relief. "That's that."

"One more thing." Kramer picked up the microphone. "Return to the moon and land the ship at the first space field," he said into it.

"Good Lord," Winter murmured. "Why are you—"

"Be quiet." Kramer stood, listening. The turbines gasped and roared as the ship swung full around, gaining speed. They were moving back, back toward the moon again. The ship dipped down, heading toward the great globe below.

"We're going a little fast," the Pilot said. "I don't see how he

can put down at this velocity."

THE port filled up, as the globe swelled rapidly. The Pilot hurried toward the board, reaching for the controls. All at once the ship jerked. The nose lifted and the ship shot out into space, away from the moon, turning at an oblique angle. The men were thrown to the floor by the sudden change in course. They got to their feet again, speechless, staring at each other.

The Pilot gazed down at the board. "It wasn't me! I didn't touch a thing. I didn't even get to it."

The ship was gaining speed each moment. Kramer hesitated. "Maybe you better switch it back to manual."

The Pilot closed the switch. He took hold of the steering controls and moved them experimentally. "Nothing." He turned around. "Nothing. It doesn't respond."

No one spoke.

"You can see what has happened," Kramer said calmly. "The old man won't let go of it, now that he has it. I was afraid of this when I saw the wiring changes. Everything in this ship is centrally controlled, even the cooling system, the hatches, the garbage release. We're helpless."

"Nonsense." Gross strode to the board. He took hold of the wheel and turned it. The ship continued on its course, moving away from the moon, leaving it behind.

"Release!" Kramer said into the microphone. "Let go of the controls! We'll take it back. Release."

"No good," the Pilot said. "Nothing." He spun the useless wheel. "It's dead, completely dead."

"And we're still heading out," Winter said, grinning foolishly. "We'll be going through the first-line defense belt in a few minutes. If they don't shoot us down—"

"We better radio back." The Pilot clicked the radio to *send*. "I'll contact the main bases, one of the observation stations."

"Better get the defense belt, at the speed we're going. We'll be in to it in a minute."

"And after that," Kramer said, "we'll be in outer space. He's moving us toward outspace velocity. Is this ship equipped with baths?"

"Baths?" Gross said.

"The sleep tanks. For space-drive. We may need them if we go much faster."

"But good God, where are we going?" Gross said. "Where—where's he taking us?"

THE Pilot obtained contact. "This is Dwight, on ship," he said. "We're entering the defense zone at high velocity. Don't fire on us."

"Turn back," the impersonal voice came through the speaker. "You're not allowed in the defense zone."

"We can't. We've lost control."

"Lost control?"

"This is an experimental ship."

Gross took the radio. "This is Commander Gross, Security. We're being carried into outer space. There's nothing we can do. Is there any way that we can be removed from this ship?"

A hesitation. "We have some fast pursuit ships that could pick you up if you wanted to jump. The chances are good they'd find you. Do you have space flares?"

"We do," the Pilot said. "Let's try it."

"Abandon ship?" Kramer said. "If we leave now we'll never see it again."

"What else can we do? We're gaining speed all the time. Do you propose that we stay here?"

"No." Kramer shook his head. "Damn it, there ought to be a better solution."

"Could you contact *him*?" Winter asked. "The Old Man? Try to reason with him?"

"It's worth a chance," Gross said. "Try it."

"All right." Kramer took the microphone. He paused a moment. "Listen! Can you hear me? This is Phil Kramer. Can you hear me, Professor. Can you hear me? I want you to release the controls."

There was silence.

"This is Kramer, Professor. Can you hear me? Do you remember who I am? Do you understand who this is?"

Above the control panel the wall speaker made a sound, a sputtering static. They looked up.

"Can you hear me, Professor. This

is Philip Kramer. I want you to give the ship back to us. If you can hear me, release the controls! Let go, Professor. Let go!"

Static. A rushing sound, like the wind. They gazed at each other. There was silence for a moment.

"It's a waste of time," Gross said.

"No—listen!"

The sputter came again. Then, mixed with the sputter, almost lost in it, a voice came, toneless, without inflection, a mechanical, lifeless voice from the metal speaker in the wall, above their heads.

"... Is it you, Philip? I can't make you out. Darkness... Who's there? With you..."

"It's me, Kramer." His fingers tightened against the microphone handle. "You must release the controls, Professor. We have to get back to Terra. You must."

Silence. Then the faint, faltering voice came again, a little stronger than before. "Kramer. Everything so strange. I was right, though. Consciousness result of thinking. Necessary result. Cognito ergo sum. Retain conceptual ability. Can you hear me?"

"Yes, Professor—"

"I altered the wiring. Control. I was fairly certain... I wonder if I can do it. Try..."

Suddenly the air-conditioning snapped into operation. It snapped abruptly off again. Down the corridor a door slammed. Something thudded. The men stood listening. Sounds came from all sides of them, switches shutting, opening. The

lights blinked off; they were in darkness. The lights came back on, and at the same time the heating coils dimmed and faded.

"Good God!" Winter said.

Water poured down on them, the emergency fire-fighting system. There was a screaming rush of air. One of the escape hatches had slid back, and the air was roaring frantically out into space.

The hatch banged closed. The ship subsided into silence. The heating coils glowed into life. As suddenly as it had begun the weird exhibition ceased.

"I can do—everything," the dry, toneless voice came from the wall speaker. "It is all controlled. Kramer, I wish to talk to you. I've been—been thinking. I haven't seen you in many years. A lot to discuss. You've changed, boy. We have much to discuss. Your wife—"

The Pilot grabbed Kramer's arm. "There's a ship standing off our bow. Look."

THEY ran to the port. A slender pale craft was moving along with them, keeping pace with them. It was signal-blinking.

"A Terran pursuit ship," the Pilot said. "Let's jump. They'll pick us up. Suits—"

He ran to a supply cupboard and turned the handle. The door opened and he pulled the suits out onto the floor.

"Hurry," Gross said. A panic seized them. They dressed frantically, pulling the heavy garments

over them. Winter staggered to the escape hatch and stood by it, waiting for the others. They joined him, one by one.

"Let's go!" Gross said. "Open the hatch."

Winter tugged at the hatch. "Help me."

They grabbed hold, tugging together. Nothing happened. The hatch refused to budge.

"Get a crowbar," the Pilot said.

"Hasn't anyone got a blaster?" Gross looked frantically around. "Damn it, blast it open!"

"Pull," Kramer grated. "Pull together."

"Are you at the hatch?" the toneless voice came, drifting and eddying through the corridors of the ship. They looked up, staring around them. "I sense something nearby, outside. A ship? You are leaving, all of you? Kramer, you are leaving, too? Very unfortunate. I had hoped we could talk. Perhaps at some other time you might be induced to remain."

"Open the hatch!" Kramer said, staring up at the impersonal walls of the ship. "For God's sake, open it!"

There was silence, an endless pause. Then, very slowly, the hatch slid back. The air screamed out, rushing past them into space.

One by one they leaped, one after the other, propelled away by the repulsive material of the suits. A few minutes later they were being hauled aboard the pursuit ship. As the last one of them was lifted

through the port, their own ship pointed itself suddenly upward and shot off at tremendous speed. It disappeared.

Kramer removed his helmet, gasping. Two sailors held onto him and began to wrap him in blankets. Gross sipped a mug of coffee, shivering.

"It's gone," Kramer murmured.

"I'll have an alarm sent out," Gross said.

"What's happened to your ship?" a sailor asked curiously. "It sure took off in a hurry. 'Who's on it?'"

"We'll have to have it destroyed," Gross went on, his face grim. "It's got to be destroyed. There's no telling what it—what *he* has in mind." Gross sat down weakly on a metal bench. "What a close call for us. We were so damn trusting."

"What could he be planning," Kramer said, half to himself. "It doesn't make sense. I don't get it."

AS the ship sped back toward the moon base they sat around the table in the dining room, sipping hot coffee and thinking, not saying very much.

"Look here," Gross said at last. "What kind of man was Professor Thomas? What do you remember about him?"

Kramer put his coffee mug down. "It was ten years ago. I don't remember much. It's vague."

He let his mind run back over the years. He and Dolores had been at Hunt College together, in physics and the life sciences. The

College was small and set back away from the momentum of modern life. He had gone there because it was his home town, and his father had gone there before him.

Professor Thomas had been at the College a long time, as long as anyone could remember. He was a strange old man, keeping to himself most of the time. There were many things that he disapproved of, but he seldom said what they were.

"Do you recall anything that might help us?" Gross asked. "Anything that would give us a clue as to what he might have in mind?"

Kramer nodded slowly. "I remember one thing . . ."

One day he and the Professor had been sitting together in the school chapel, talking leisurely.

"Well, you'll be out of school, soon," the Professor had said. "What are you going to do?"

"Do? Work at one of the Government Research Projects, I suppose."

"And eventually? What's your ultimate goal?"

Kramer had smiled. "The question is unscientific. It presupposes such things as ultimate ends."

"Suppose instead along these lines, then: What if there were no war and no Government Research Projects? What would you do, then?"

"I don't know. But how can I imagine a hypothetical situation like that? There's been war as long as I can remember. We're geared for war. I don't know what I'd do. I suppose I'd adjust, get used

to it."

The Professor had stared at him. "Oh, you do think you'd get accustomed to it, eh? Well, I'm glad of that. And you think you could find something to do?"

Gross listened intently. "What do you infer from this, Kramer?"

"Not much. Except that he was against war."

"We're all against war," Gross pointed out.

"True. But he was withdrawn, set apart. He lived very simply, cooking his own meals. His wife died many years ago. He was born in Europe, in Italy. He changed his name when he came to the United States. He used to read Dante and Milton. He even had a Bible."

"Very anachronistic, don't you think?"

"Yes, he lived quite a lot in the past. He found an old phonograph and records, and he listened to the old music. You saw his house, how old-fashioned it was."

"Did he have a file?" Winter asked Gross.

"With Security? No, none at all. As far as we could tell he never engaged in political work, never joined anything or even seemed to have strong political convictions."

"No," Kramer agreed. "About all he ever did was walk through the hills. He liked nature."

"Nature can be of great use to a scientist," Gross said. "There wouldn't be any science without it."

"Kramer, what do you think his plan is, taking control of the ship

and disappearing?" Winter said.

"Maybe the transfer made him insane," the Pilot said. "Maybe there's no plan, nothing rational at all."

"But he had the ship rewired, and he had made sure that he would retain consciousness and memory before he even agreed to the operation. He must have had something planned from the start. But what?"

"Perhaps he just wanted to stay alive longer," Kramer said. "He was old and about to die. Or—"

"Or what?"

"Nothing." Kramer stood up. "I think as soon as we get to the moon base I'll make a vidcall to earth. I want to talk to somebody about this."

"Who's that?" Gross asked.

"Dolores. Maybe she remembers something."

"That's a good idea," Gross said.

"WHERE are you calling from?" Dolores asked, when he succeeded in reaching her.

"From the moon base."

"All kinds of rumors are running around. Why didn't the ship come back? What happened?"

"I'm afraid he ran off with it."

"He?"

"The Old Man. Professor Thomas." Kramer explained what had happened.

Dolores listened intently. "How strange. And you think he planned it all in advance, from the start?"

"I'm certain. He asked for the plans of construction and the theo-

retical diagrams at once."

"But why? What for?"

"I don't know. Look, Dolores. What do you remember about him? Is there anything that might give a clue to all this?"

"Like what?"

"I don't know. That's the trouble."

On the vidscreen Dolores knitted her brow. "I remember he raised chickens in his back yard, and once he had a goat." She smiled. "Do you remember the day the goat got loose and wandered down the main street of town? Nobody could figure out where it came from."

"Anything else?"

"No." He watched her struggling, trying to remember. "He wanted to have a farm, sometime, I know."

"All right. Thanks." Kramer touched the switch. "When I get back to Terra maybe I'll stop and see you."

"Let me know how it works out."

He cut the line and the picture dimmed and faded. He walked slowly back to where Gross and some officers of the Military were sitting at a chart table, talking.

"Any luck?" Gross said, looking up.

"No. All she remembers is that he kept a goat."

"Come over and look at this detail chart." Gross motioned him around to his side. "Watch!"

Kramer saw the record tabs moving furiously, the little white dots racing back and forth.

"What's happening?" he asked.

"A squadron outside the defense zone has finally managed to contact the ship. They're maneuvering now, for position. Watch."

The white counters were forming a barrel formation around a black dot that was moving steadily across the board, away from the central position. As they watched, the white dots constricted around it.

"They're ready to open fire," a technician at the board said. "Commander, what shall we tell them to do?"

Gross hesitated. "I hate to be the one who makes the decision. When it comes right down to it—"

"It's not just a ship," Kramer said. "It's a man, a living person. A human being is up there, moving through space. I wish we knew what—"

"But the order has to be given. We can't take any chances. Suppose he went over to them, to the yuks."

Kramer's jaw dropped. "My God, he wouldn't do that."

"Are you sure? Do you know what he'll do?"

"He wouldn't do that."

Gross turned to the technician. "Tell them to go ahead."

"I'm sorry, sir, but now the ship has gotten away. Look down at the board."

GROSS stared down, Kramer over his shoulder. The black dot had slipped through the white dots and had moved off at an abrupt an-

gle. The white dots were broken up, dispersing in confusion.

"He's an unusual strategist," one of the officers said. He traced the line. "It's an ancient maneuver, an old Prussian device, but it worked."

The white dots were turning back. "Too many yuk ships out that far," Gross said. "Well, that's what you get when you don't act quickly." He looked up coldly at Kramer. "We should have done it when we had him. Look at him go!" He jabbed a finger at the rapidly moving black dot. The dot came to the edge of the board and stopped. It had reached the limit of the chartered area. "See?"

—Now what? Kramer thought, watching. So the Old Man had escaped the cruisers and gotten away. He was alert, all right; there was nothing wrong with his mind. Or with ability to control his new body.

Body— The ship was a new body for him. He had traded in the old dying body, withered and frail, for this hulking frame of metal and plastic, turbines and rocket jets. He was strong, now. Strong and big. The new body was more powerful than a thousand human bodies. But how long would it last him? The average life of a cruiser was only ten years. With careful handling he might get twenty out of it, before some essential part failed and there was no way to replace it.

And then, what then? What would he do, when something failed and there was no one to fix it for him? That would be the end. Some-

place, far out in the cold darkness of space, the ship would slow down, silent and lifeless, to exhaust its last heat into the eternal timelessness of outer space. Or perhaps it would crash on some barren asteroid, burst into a million fragments.

It was only a question of time.

"Your wife didn't remember anything?" Gross said.

"I told you. Only that he kept a goat, once."

"A hell of a lot of help that is."

Kramer shrugged. "It's not my fault."

"I wonder if we'll ever see him again," Gross stared down at the indicator dot, still hanging at the edge of the board. "I wonder if he'll ever move back this way."

"I wonder, too," Kramer said.

THAT night Kramer lay in bed, tossing from side to side, unable to sleep. The moon gravity, even artificially increased, was unfamiliar to him and it made him uncomfortable. A thousand thoughts wandered loose in his head as he lay, fully awake.

What did it all mean? What was the Professor's plan? Maybe they would never know. Maybe the ship was gone for good; the Old Man had left forever, shooting into outer space. They might never find out why he had done it, what purpose—if any—had been in his mind.

Kramer sat up in bed. He turned on the light and lit a cigarette. His quarters were small, a metal-lined bunk room, part of the moon sta-

tion base.

The Old Man had wanted to talk to him. He had wanted to discuss things, hold a conversation, but in the hysteria and confusion all they had been able to think of was getting away. The ship was rushing off with them, carrying them into outer space. Kramer set his jaw. Could they be blamed for jumping? They had no idea where they were being taken, or why. They were helpless, caught in their own ship, and the pursuit ship standing by waiting to pick them up was their only chance. Another half hour and it would have been too late.

But what had the Old Man wanted to say? What had he intended to tell him, in those first confusing moments when the ship around them had come alive, each metal strut and wire suddenly animate, the body of a living creature, a vast metal organism?

It was weird, unnerving. He could not forget it, even now. He looked around the small room uneasily. What did it signify, the coming to life of metal and plastic? All at once they had found themselves inside a living creature, in its stomach, like Jonah inside the whale.

It had been alive, and it had talked to them, talked calmly and rationally, as it rushed them off, faster and faster into outer space. The wall speaker and circuit had become the vocal cords and mouth, the wiring the spinal cord and nerves, the hatches and relays and circuit breakers the muscles.

They had been helpless, completely helpless. The ship had, in a brief second, stolen their power away from them and left them defenseless, practically at its mercy. It was not right; it made him uneasy. All his life he had controlled machines, bent nature and the forces of nature to man and man's needs. The human race had slowly evolved until it was in a position to operate things, run them as it saw fit. Now all at once it had been plunged back down the ladder again, prostrate before a Power against which they were children.

Kramer got out of bed. He put on his bathrobe and began to search for a cigarette. While he was searching, the vidphone rang.

He snapped the vidphone on. "Yes?"

The face of the immediate monitor appeared. "A call from Terra, Mr. Kramer. An emergency call."

"Emergency call? For me? Put it through." Kramer came awake, brushing his hair back out of his eyes. Alarm plucked at him.

From the speaker a strange voice came. "Philip Kramer? Is this Kramer?"

"Yes. Go on."

"This is General Hospital, New York City, Terra. Mr. Kramer, your wife is here. She has been critically injured in an accident. Your name was given to us to call. Is it possible for you to—"

"How badly?" Kramer gripped the vidphone stand. "Is it serious?"

"Yes, it's serious, Mr. Kramer.

Are you able to come here? The quicker you can come the better."

"Yes." Kramer nodded. "I'll come. Thanks."

THE screen died as the connection was broken. Kramer waited a moment. Then he tapped the button. The screen relit again. "Yes, sir," the monitor said.

"Can I get a ship to Terra at once? It's an emergency. My wife —"

"There's no ship leaving the moon for eight hours. You'll have to wait until the next period."

"Isn't there anything I can do?"

"We can broadcast a general request to all ships passing through this area. Sometimes cruisers pass by here returning to Terra for repairs."

"Will you broadcast that for me? I'll come down to the field."

"Yes sir. But there may be no ship in the area for awhile. It's a gamble." The screen died.

Kramer dressed quickly. He put on his coat and hurried to the lift. A moment later he was running across the general receiving lobby, past the rows of vacant desks and conference tables. At the door the sentries stepped aside and he went outside, onto the great concrete steps.

The face of the moon was in shadow. Below him the field stretched out in total darkness, a black void, endless, without form. He made his way carefully down the steps and along the ramp along the

side of the field, to the control tower. A faint row of red lights showed him the way.

Two soldiers challenged him at the foot of the tower, standing in the shadows, their guns ready.

"Kramer?"

"Yes." A light was flashed in his face.

"Your call has been sent out already."

"Any luck?" Kramer asked.

"There's a cruiser nearby that has made contact with us. It has an injured jet and is moving slowly back toward Terra, away from the line."

"Good." Kramer nodded, a flood of relief rushing through him. He lit a cigarette and gave one to each of the soldiers. The soldiers lit up.

"Sir," one of them asked, "is it true about the experimental ship?"

"What do you mean?"

"It came to life and ran off?"

"No, not exactly," Kramer said. "It had a new type of control system instead of the Johnson units. It wasn't properly tested."

"But sir, one of the cruisers that was there got up close to it, and a buddy of mine says this ship acted funny. He never saw anything like it. It was like when he was fishing once on Terra, in Washington State, fishing for bass. The fish were smart, going this way and that—"

"Here's your cruiser," the other soldier said. "Look!"

An enormous vague shape was settling slowly down onto the field. They could make nothing out but

its row of tiny green blinkers. Kramer stared at the shape.

"Better hurry, sir," the soldiers said. "They don't stick around here very long."

"Thanks." Kramer loped across the field, toward the black shape that rose up above him, extended across the width of the field. The ramp was down from the side of the cruiser and he caught hold of it. The ramp rose, and a moment later Kramer was inside the hold of the ship. The hatch slid shut behind him.

As he made his way up the stairs to the main deck the turbines roared up from the moon, out into space.

Kramer opened the door to the main deck. He stopped suddenly, staring around him in surprise. There was nobody in sight. The ship was deserted.

"Good God," he said. Realization swept over him, numbing him. He sat down on a bench, his head swimming. "Good God."

The ship roared out into space leaving the moon and Terra farther behind each moment.

And there was nothing he could do.

"SO it was you who put the call through," he said at last. "It was you who called me on the vid-phone, not any hospital on Terra. It was all part of the plan." He looked up and around him. "And Dolores is really—"

"Your wife is fine," the wall speaker above him said tonelessly.

"It was a fraud. I am sorry to trick you that way, Philip, but it was all I could think of. Another day and you would have been back on Terra. I don't want to remain in this area any longer than necessary. They have been so certain of finding me out in deep space that I have been able to stay here without too much danger. But even the purloined letter was found eventually."

Kramer smoked his cigarette nervously. "What are you going to do? Where are we going?"

"First, I want to talk to you. I have many things to discuss. I was very disappointed when you left me, along with the others. I had hoped that you would remain." The dry voice chuckled. "Remember how we used to talk in the old days, you and I? That was a long time ago."

The ship was gaining speed. It plunged through space at tremendous speed, rushing through the last of the defense zone and out beyond. A rush of nausea made Kramer bend over for a moment.

When he straightened up the voice from the wall went on, "I'm sorry to step it up so quickly, but we are still in danger. Another few moments and we'll be free."

"How about yuk ships? Aren't they out here?"

"I've already slipped away from several of them. They're quite curious about me."

"Curious?"

"They sense that I'm different,

more like their own organic mines. They don't like it. I believe they will begin to withdraw from this area, soon. Apparently they don't want to get involved with me. They're an odd race, Philip. I would have liked to study them closely, try to learn something about them. I'm of the opinion that they use no inert material. All their equipment and instruments are alive, in some form or other. They don't construct or build at all. The idea of *making* is foreign to them. They utilize existing forms. Even their ships—"

"Where are we going?" Kramer said. "I want to know where you are taking me."

"Frankly, I'm not certain."

"You're not certain?"

"I haven't worked some details out. There are a few vague spots in my program, still. But I think that in a short while I'll have them ironed out."

"What is your program?" Kramer said.

"It's really very simple. But don't you want to come into the control room and sit? The seats are much more comfortable than that metal bench."

Kramer went into the control room and sat down at the control board. Looking at the useless apparatus made him feel strange.

"What's the matter?" the speaker above the board rasped.

KRAMER gestured helplessly. "I'm—powerless. I can't do

anything. And I don't like it. Do you blame me?"

"No. No, I don't blame you. But you'll get your control back, soon. Don't worry. This is only a temporary expedient, taking you off this way. It was something I didn't contemplate. I forgot that orders would be given out to shoot me on sight."

"It was Gross' idea."

"I don't doubt that. My conception, my plan, came to me as soon as you began to describe your project, that day at my house. I saw at once that you were wrong; you people have no understanding of the mind at all. I realized that the transfer of a human brain from an organic body to a complex artificial space ship would not involve the loss of the intellectualization faculty of the mind. When a man thinks, he is.

"When I realized that, I saw the possibility of an age-old dream becoming real. I was quite elderly when I first met you, Philip. Even then my life-span had come pretty much to its end. I could look ahead to nothing but death, and with it the extinction of all my ideas. I had made no mark on the world, none at all. My students, one by one, passed from me into the world, to take up jobs in the great Research Project, the search for better and bigger weapons of war.

"The world has been fighting for a long time, first with itself, then with the Martians, then with these beings from Proxima Centauri,

whom we know nothing about. The human society has evolved war as a cultural institution; like the science of astronomy, or mathematics. War is a part of our lives, a career, a respected vocation. Bright, alert young men and women move into it, putting their shoulders to the wheel as they did in the time of Nebuchadnezzar. It has always been so.

"But is it innate in mankind? I don't think so. No social custom is innate. There were many human groups that did not go to war; the Eskimos never grasped the idea at all, and the American Indians never took to it well.

"But these dissenters were wiped out, and a cultural pattern was established that became the standard for the whole planet. Now it has become ingrained in us.

"But if someplace along the line some other way of settling problems had arisen and taken hold, something different than the massing of men and material to—"

"What's your plan?" Kramer said. "I know the theory. It was part of one of your lectures."

"Yes, buried in a lecture on plant selection, as I recall. When you came to me with this proposition I realized that perhaps my conception could be brought to life, after all. If my theory were right that war is only a habit, not an instinct, a society built up apart from Terra with a minimum of cultural roots might develop differently. If it failed to absorb our outlook, if it

could start out on another foot, it might not arrive at the same point to which we have come: a dead end, with nothing but greater and greater wars in sight, until nothing is left but ruin and destruction everywhere.

"Of course, there would have to be a Watcher to guide the experiment; at first. A crisis would undoubtedly come very quickly, probably in the second generation. Cain would arise almost at once.

"You see, Kramer, I estimate that if I remain at rest most of the time, on some small planet or moon, I may be able to keep functioning for almost a hundred years. That would be time enough, sufficient to see the direction of the new colony. After that—Well, after that it would be up to the colony itself.

"Which is just as well, of course. Man must take control eventually, on his own. One hundred years, and after that they will have control of their own destiny. Perhaps I am wrong, perhaps war is more than a habit. Perhaps it is a law of the universe, that things can only survive as groups by group violence.

"But I'm going ahead and taking the chance that it is only a habit, that I'm right, that war is something we're so accustomed to that we don't realize it is a very unnatural thing. Now as to the place! I'm still a little vague about that. We must find the place, still.

"That's what we're doing now. You and I are going to inspect a few systems off the beaten path, planets where the trading prospects are low

enough to keep Terran ships away. I know of one planet that might be a good place. It was reported by the Fairchild Expedition in their original manual. We may look into that for a start."

The ship was silent.

KRAMER sat for a time, staring down at the metal floor under him. The floor throbbed dully with the motion of the turbines. At last he looked up.

"You might be right. Maybe our outlook is only a habit." Kramer got to his feet. "But I wonder if something has occurred to you?"

"What is that?"

"If it's such a deeply ingrained habit, going back thousands of years, how are you going to get your colonists to make the break, leave Terra and Terran customs? How about *this* generation, the first ones, the people who found the colony? I think you're right that the next generation would be free of all this, if there were an—" He grinned. "—An Old Man Above to teach them something else instead."

Kramer looked up at the wall speaker. "How are you going to get the people to leave Terra and come with you, if by your own theory, this generation can't be saved, it all has to start with the next?"

The wall speaker was silent. Then it made a sound, the faint dry chuckle.

"I'm surprised at you Philip. Settlers can be found. We won't need many, just a few." The speak-

er chuckled again. "I'll acquaint you with my solution."

At the far end of the corridor a door slid open. There was sound, a hesitant sound. Kramer turned.

"Dolores!"

Dolores Kramer stood uncertainly, looking into the control room. She blinked in amazement. "Phil! What are you doing here? What's going on?"

They stared at each other.

"What's happening?" Dolores said. "I received a vidcall that you had been hurt in a lunar explosion —"

The wall speaker rasped into life. "You see, Philip, that problem is already solved. We don't really need so many people; even a single couple might do."

Kramer nodded slowly. "I see," he murmured thickly. "Just one couple. One-man and woman."

"They might make it all right, if there were someone to watch and see that things went as they should. There will be quite a few things I can help you with, Philip. Quite a few. We'll get along very well, I think."

Kramer grinned wryly. "You could even help us name the animals," he said. "I understand that's the first step."

"I'll be glad to," the toneless, impersonal voice said. "As I recall, my part will be to bring them to you, one by one. Then you can

do the actual naming."

"I don't understand," Dolores faltered. "What does he mean, Phil? Naming animals. What kind of animals? Where are we going?"

Kramer walked slowly over to the port and stood staring silently out, his arms folded. Beyond the ship a myriad fragments of light gleamed, countless coals glowing in the dark void. Stars, suns, systems. Endless, without number. A universe of worlds. An infinity of planets, waiting for them, gleaming and winking from the darkness.

He turned back, away from the port. "Where are we going?" He smiled at his wife, standing nervous and frightened, her large eyes full of alarm. "I don't know where we are going," he said. "But somehow that doesn't seem too important right now . . . I'm beginning to see the Professor's point, it's the result that counts."

And for the first time in many months he put his arm around Dolores. At first she stiffened, the fright and nervousness still in her eyes. But then suddenly she relaxed against him and there were tears wetting her cheeks.

"Phil . . . do you really think we can start over again—you and I?"

He kissed her tenderly, then passionately.

And the spaceship shot swiftly through the endless, trackless eternity of the void . . .

IMPORTANT!

For Your XMAS Subscription — See Page 162

☆ *How Many Horses To A Rocket?* ☆

BACK in the middle of the Nineteenth Century, James Watt's steam engine had to have something by which its power could be compared. The good Scots engineer chose the most familiar thing he could—the tried and true horse! Ever since machines have used this rather arbitrary standard and it appears as if it is going to be with us for a long time to come — even in this Age of Rocket Power!

Strangely enough though, you don't often see the word "horsepower" connected with jet airplanes and rocket motors. Technically speaking there is no real reason why this shouldn't be done except that there are a few more convenient ideas for expressing the power of such super-machines.

Rockets and jets rely on two quantities, thrust and speed, and it is the combination of these that generate what we call horsepower. Unfortunately the horsepower of such engines is rarely given, and consequently it is impossible to appreciate just how powerful jets and rockets actually are.

The largest ordinary reciprocating engines generate two or three thousand horsepower. A large plane will employ four—or a total of ten thousand horsepower.

By a simple calculation, it is possible to compute the horsepower of a jet or rocket motor. You just multiply the thrust (in pounds) by the speed of the ship (in feet per second) and then divide by the number 550. The answer comes out in horsepower. If you do this for a

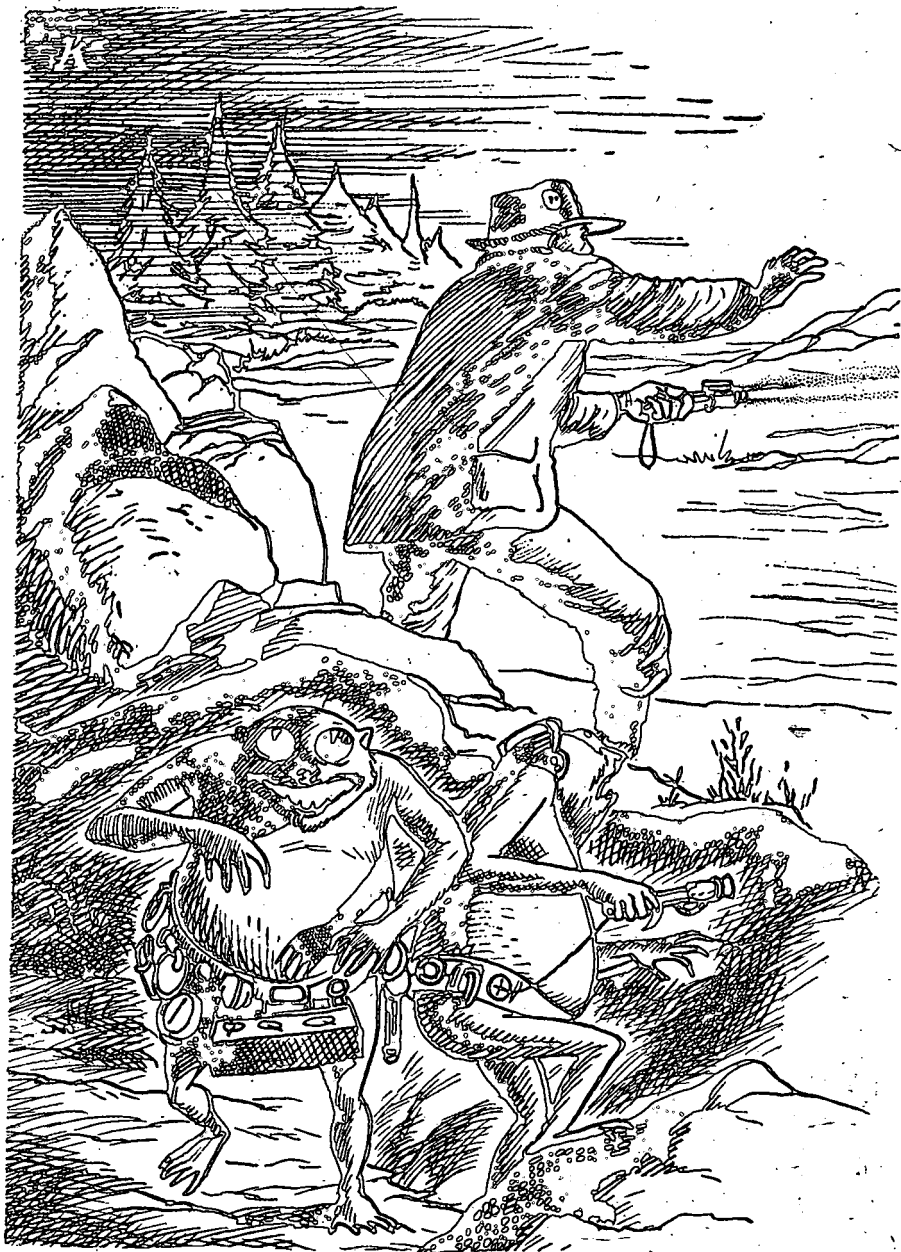
typical jet plane whose speed is say 600 miles per hour and whose thrust is 7,500 pounds (even more powerful jet engines exist) it turns out that the jet engine is working at the rate of 12,000 horsepower—just one engine!

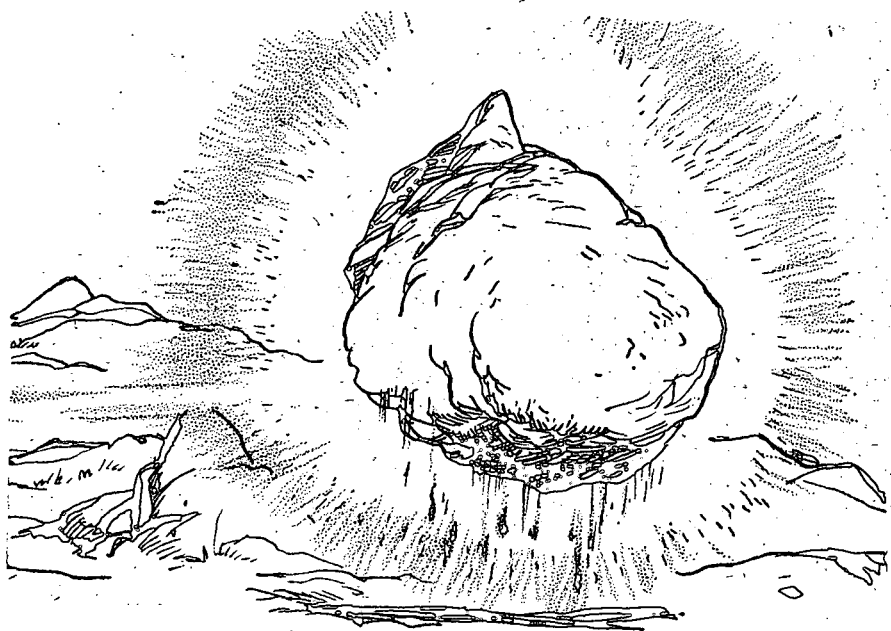
This is just one example of the incredible power capsuled in the relatively tiny power plant of a jet. If you extend the same treatment to rockets, the results are even more fantastic.

For that example, consider Man's biggest rocket, the V-2. This machine has a speed of 3,600 miles per hour and a thrust measured in terms of many tons. When you compute the horsepower, the V-2 comes out with something in the neighborhood of 500,000! Of course the time period for which the engine works is quite short—a matter of minutes—but the point is that it is generating gigantic energies almost beyond our conception; still that is peanuts compared with what is to come.

Perhaps using the horsepower comparison is a somewhat archaic and antiquated way of measuring the energies of the New Age, but few standards give a more impressive picture of just how far we've come since the day of the horse-drawn wagon and the ox-cart. It is just as easy to express these powers in terms of electrical watts, but this is a cold and unromantic way of describing the fierce energies of a rocket. When you say "five hundred thousand horses!" nobody can mistake that graphic picture!

☆ ☆ ☆





RESTRICTED TOOL

By

Malcolm B. Morehart, Jr.

Finders, keepers, is an unwritten law. But the gadget Clark accidentally found had a special set of rules governing its use by whom—and when!

RICHARD Clark loaded his shotgun. He glanced up the canyon, gray and misty under a cold dawn sky. A cotton-tail darted from a nearby bush and bounced away. Clark's gunsights followed in a weaving line after his bobbing target. Before he could draw a bead, the rabbit vanished behind a distant scrub oak. Clark stalked him quietly. He knew he'd bag this one without trouble, but any others around him would take cover at his first shot.

His boots crunched loudly on gravel. At the sound the rabbit sprang into the open and zigzagged toward a thicket. Furious at his clumsiness, Clark blasted away with both barrels. He charged up the canyon, fumbling in his parka for more shells, and crashed through dank high brush into a shadowy clearing. A soft rustling sound quickly faded.

"Well, there he goes," Clark grumbled.

Something metallic glittered in a low, thorny shrub, and he bent down, curious. From a black cord caught in its branches dangled a silvery pocket flashlight. He smiled faintly as he pulled it loose. After months of testing and inspecting complicated electronic devices, he found simple gadgets amusing. He pressed a button on one end and eyed a white knob on the other. When it didn't light up, he stuffed it in a pocket, finishing reloading, and sighed, "At least I bagged something."

"Quite true!" a voice shrilled behind him.

Clark whirled around and gasped in astonishment. Two squat dwarfish men crouched at the far side of the clearing. When he swung up his 16 gauge, two lights flashed, and it slid out of his hands. He buckled dizzily with weakness and nausea, but then an invisible force jolted him upright and motionless. He felt rigid as stone.

"Who are you?" Clark called out

hoarsely.

They approached, jabbering in a strange tongue. Bluish dawnlight seemed to tint their scrawny bare arms and legs a deeper, ghastly blue. From weazel-shaped heads bulged enormous dark eyes which stared at him unblinkingly. As they waddled closer they puffed under the weight of heavy belts sagging with rows of odd, translucent instruments. One creature wore ear-phones. The other, his bald head sunken between his shoulders, opened a round, moist, pink-rimmed mouth and bowed stiffly.

"Forgive us, please," he piped. "My biologist friend has broken regulations."

"Who are you?" Clark choked again.

The bald one's eyes closed and his belly quivered with high, tremulous laughter. "Tell him, Ursi!"

"Don't blame me!" the one called Ursi squeaked, then pointed a claw-like finger at a glowing disc in his belt. "Interference disturbed the scanner scope. I didn't see him until he fired!"

Baldy chuckled. "He was after food, not your ugly hide. But in your unseemly haste to escape, you dropped a valuable tool. A very careless blunder. And now instead of mold specimens, you've collected a human. I knew this expedition would prove interesting."

"We have to dispose of him!" Ursi shrieked and waved a black tube at Clark menacingly.

"You'd kill him to recover your tool?" Baldy's nose twitched. "Remember we prepare separate reports for the Council. Don't expect me to aid in breaking the law."

Ursi was painfully silent.

BALDY seemed to relish his companion's distress. "You realize, Ursi, you're responsible for this illegal contact? Also may I remind you that the Law reads in part: On pain of death, no human shall be molested, coerced or in any way injured by an expeditionary member's overt action."

"Can't we bargain with him?" Ursi asked irritably.

"Why, of course. Offer him our ship or your life," Baldy said.

Ursi scowled. "If we take the tool and induce amnesia—"

"The Law clearly prohibits that."

"Let him keep it then," Ursi said angrily, rubbing a pointed blue chin. "I'll destroy its power principle first."

Baldy sighed. "I repeat, this isn't a brainless Martian without legal rights. You abandoned it, a human found it. By merely picking up the tool, he establishes a salvage claim."

"You call that law?" Ursi raged. "Stupid technicalities that settle one problem to raise a worse one?"

"Until the Council ratifies the amendment foreseeing this contingency," Baldy explained, "you must abide by the original code."

"But the tool's restricted!"

"Restricted for thirty solar years according to the Probability Graphs," mused Baldy. "You should have thought of that."

Ursi's wide glittering eyes terrified Clark. But after an agonizing silence, he heard Ursi whine fearfully, "We can't allow this! Can't you read his basic attitudes? He's suffering from the Korb power complex."

Baldy shrugged. "Your misfortune, my dear Ursi."

Ursi edged warily toward Clark as if he were a ferocious but chained beast. "Your nation is a member of the Western Alliance?"

Bewildered, Clark cleared his throat. "Yes."

"You have atomic weapons you intend using against your enemy—against the Eastern Empire?"

"If they attack us?" Clark muttered nervously.

Ursi shot an accusing look at Baldy who frowned. "They're vicious little children!" Ursi ranted. "The decision placing the tool on the restricted list is perfectly justified. We made no effort to hinder their atomic researches. But in the case of this tool . . . They have the ingenuity to combine it with atomic bombs! If he returns with it, he'll wreck a thousand years of human culture!"

Ursi's excited words puzzled Clark who was overcoming his early shock. But the cylinder in his pocket was still more baffling. What was it? What terrible power did it

control?

"Spare your world suffering." Ursi warned. "Surrender it to me."

Clark considered. Sheltered by their "Law," he knew he could make a free decision. The thing was powerful. But they claimed it was exceedingly dangerous, and they seemed wiser, far wiser, than men. The mysterious force still binding him and their hints of "restrictions" on human progress convinced him of that. Still, possession was nine-tenths of any law . . . He calculated nervously.

"Well?" Ursi shrilled. "Your hands are now free to move."

Obediently Clark groped in his pocket. When his fingertips touched the cool metal, the thrill of possessing immense power overwhelmed him. He sputtered; "It's mine—I won't misuse it!"

Baldy convulsed with laughter. Ursi jabbered fiercely, but Baldy raised a thin claw. He spoke softly, and Ursi's eyes brightened. Ursi nodded, but whatever he had agreed to still left him looking doubtful and uncertain.

Baldy smiled warmly. "Keep it," he said, "and keep your promise. Ursi doesn't trust you, but I do. I know you won't abuse this power."

CLARK felt his body freeze rigid as a statue again. They pushed their way out of the clearing and disappeared. Overhead a bird chirped in loneliness, and the sky slowly

turned pearly hued as the paralysis left him. Flexing his muscles, he shook his head. The creepy little men were all part of a crazy hallucination. His mad rabbit hunt and the deafening roar of his gunfire had temporarily unhinged his mind.

A low humming sound interrupted his moody pondering. Suddenly he reeled as the ground shuddered beneath him and he staggered blindly in pitch darkness. He opened his eyes to look around, dazed. His shotgun was missing, but the shiny cylinder was clutched tightly in his hand.

Clark trembled as he examined it. Along its length were etched a row of queer symbols. Probably directions for its operation or servicing, he decided. He aimed the knob at some rocks a few yards away and pressed the button. But they didn't explode or disintegrate under a lethal "ray." Then discovering that a narrow center section of the cylinder revolved by slow, even degrees, he tried again impatiently.

A loud clatter made him look up, gaping. A cluster of rocks hung motionless in the air. When his finger lifted, they fell to earth. The mechanism neutralized gravitational pull—objects could float!

Breathing excitedly, Clark twisted the center section further. The stones shot up into the sky and disappeared. Quickly he adjusted the mechanism's control and brought them flashing back. He stared at the cylinder in unbelieving awe.

Power men dreamed of surged inside it like an eager magic genie.

He experimented carefully, floating the rocks at different angles and then hurtling them skyward. When he cut off the strange power, they crashed heavily to the ground. The possibilities were tremendous! And aside from the natural hazards of collision, how could it imperil mankind? Then as a thin cloud of dust billowed up from the fallen rocks, a vision of its war potential burst upon him. Clumsy, costly rockets with a single payload were obsolete. Atomic bombs could be showered almost instantly on an enemy.

I know you won't abuse this power!

Clark recalled Baldy's hopeful, trusting words and grinned. No, he wouldn't abuse it. He realized the aliens had not understated its deadliness. No matter how the military pressed him, he wouldn't permit its use for mass bombings in the coming war. Not unless the enemy really threatened to overrun the world . . .

He left the clearing and headed down the canyon.

WHEN Clark reached the mouth of the canyon, he frowned. Out on a green meadow a farmer drove a tractor, busily plowing deep furrows for a new crop. A trim ranch house in the distance gleamed in the morning sunlight. Funny. Earlier, when he

had crossed the field, he hadn't noticed a sign of civilization. But it had been nearly dark then.

He strolled casually down to a rude stone wall and watched the tractor churn toward him. The farmer waved. He jolted to a halt, cut the engine and wiped a red bandana over his wrinkled, sweating face. Clark glanced down at his own shabby clothes and rubbed a rough, bristly chin. If he looked like a bum, his brief demonstration would seem all the more amazing.

"Pretty hot work, eh?" Clark greeted him.

"Yep," the old farmer nodded as he drank from a canteen. Clark grinned. History would record this man as the first person to actually witness a degenerator at work. Clark studied the unplowed side of the meadow, then pointed at a large, half-buried boulder.

"You have a little work there, mister. I think a Clark Farm Helper will do the trick."

The farmer gave him a puzzled look. Clark calmly beamed the rock. At first it strained up and down, but finally wrenched free. He floated it up in a slow arc, then deliberately dropped it with a heavy thud. Clark chuckled as the farmer tried to hide his astonishment with a poker face.

"That for sale?" he asked shrewdly.

Clark laughed heartily. "Not this one. I'll make a fortune manufacturing these little babies!"

"How do you figure that?"

Clark frowned at the farmer's indifference. "Can't you see its possibilities? I just showed you!"

"That's no good for farm work," the farmer said, reaching under his tractor seat. He raised what resembled a snub-nosed automatic. "This here's a real beauty. Had this general purpose degrav for two years and no trouble yet."

He squeezed the trigger and the boulder skimmed across the field.

"That looks like an old Harley single-drive you got there," the farmer said. "What'dya do? Recondition it and pep up the atomic pile?"

Stunned, Clark swallowed hard. The old farmer leaned over his wheel in curiosity. "Those old timers are pretty scarce. I remember

when the first model came out about twenty years ago; just after the war ended."

"After the war?" Clark stammered.

His mind spun in dizzy, sickening whirls. Degravitators were commonplace farm tools! Where was he? Then suddenly he knew the meaning of his strange black-out and Baldy's sly words. *I know you won't abuse this power.* How could he? Their superscience had catapulted him past the war years into the future.

The old farmer said gently, "Tell you what, son, the wife's been nagging me for a pocket degrav to move furniture around the house. I'll give you a fiver for it and a square meal. You look kinda pale."

The End

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☆ Where Candles Will Not Burn... ☆

... Problems of Space Flight ...

IN spite of the multitude of stories which have been written about rocket flight and the paradoxes which are created within the thin shells hurtling through space, very few coherent accounts of the *real* behavior of people and things have been given. It is fascinating therefore to consider some of the commonplace, accepted ideas which have to go by the board when you imagine human beings living within a rocket.

A rocket ship which is not accelerating (and this will be for most of the time of any Lunar or Interplanetary flight) is technically in a sort of "free-fall," a condition which can only be duplicated on Earth for the very brief moment occurring in a falling elevator. In a phrase, gravity is not acting, and Nature produces some strange tricks indeed.

As an example, a candle or match flame will not burn in a rocket! You light the match or candle, it burns momentarily—and then goes out. In the absence of gravity, convection, the rising of heated air does not occur and the result is that any open flames literally smother in the products of their own combustion. The flames are suffocated by the carbon dioxide gas they generate.

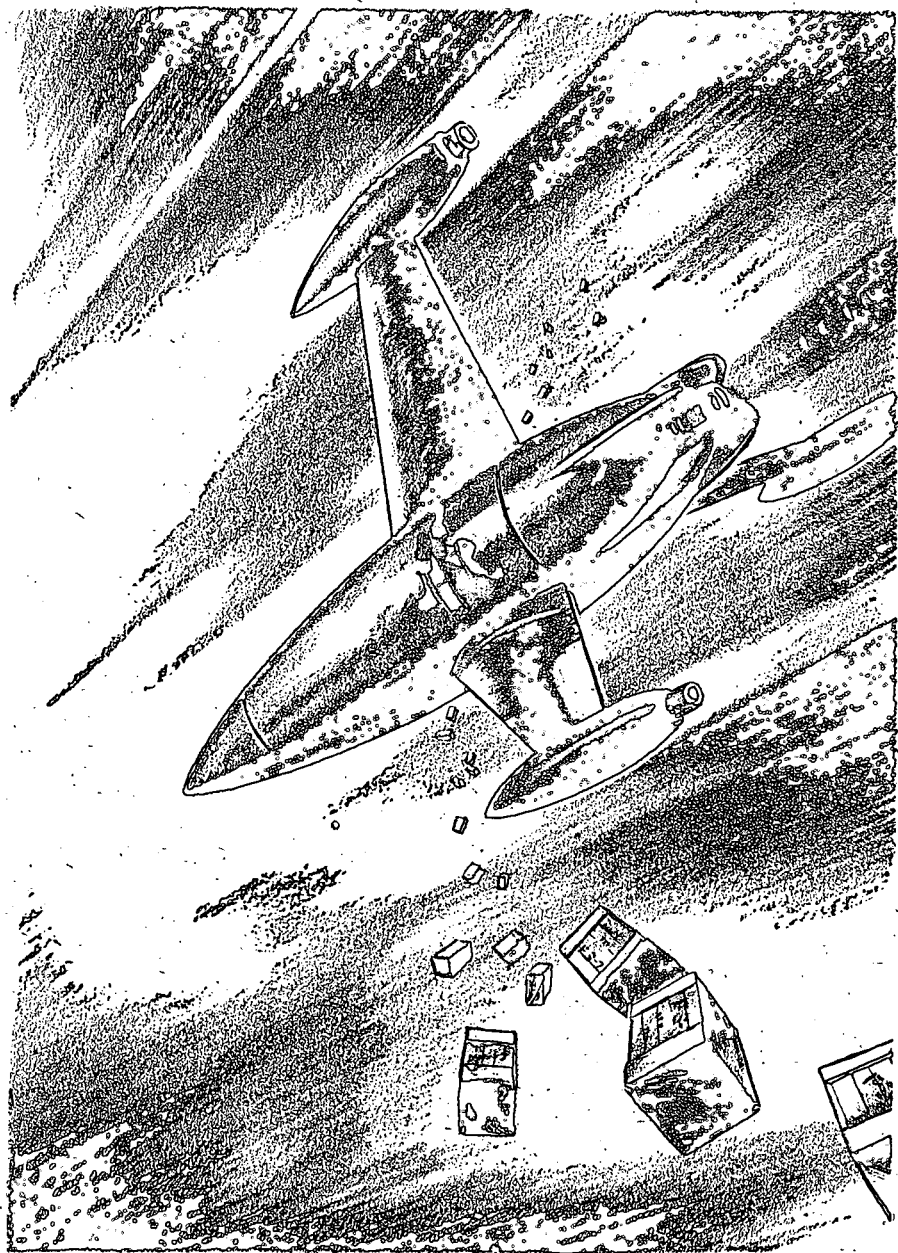
The event described is not as trivial as it seems. Since convection does not occur, a sleeping human being, or one unconscious, could suffocate in his own exhaled air. At best it would be an uncomfortable existence, always to be surrounded by

moist, muggy, exhaled air. Fortunately the remedy is simple, requiring nothing more than a simple electric fan to stir up the stagnant air, a blower to replace natural convection.

The necessity for drinking by sucking fluids from flexible collapsible containers through a straw has been treated numerous times. So has the use of strung ropes to guide weightless bodies. There are however, more serious problems.

One is the imperative need for some sort of cooling device. A rocket not only receives energy from sunlight (which can be prevented by mirror-polishing the ship) but the bodies of the inhabitants radiate surprisingly large amounts of heat. In fact, the spaceship would soon be unbearable in temperature if some means for getting rid of this continually-generated heat were not found. The answer lies in a refrigerating system relying on passing the ship's air through a series of finned radiating tubes on the outside dark surface of the vessel. Here the accumulated heat could radiate into space. If there were a large number of passengers undoubtedly some mechanical or electrical device would be necessary.

It is little matters like these which will spring up by the hundreds when space travel becomes a reality. Until then, a large number of people are trying to imagine every conceivable contingency—a pretty hard thing to do. It can only be hoped that the amateurs and experts don't even miss one bet!



SPILLTHROUGH

By

Daniel F. Galouye

Ships switching from hyper to normal space had to do it in a micro-second—if the crews were to live. But it would take Brad suicidal-minutes!

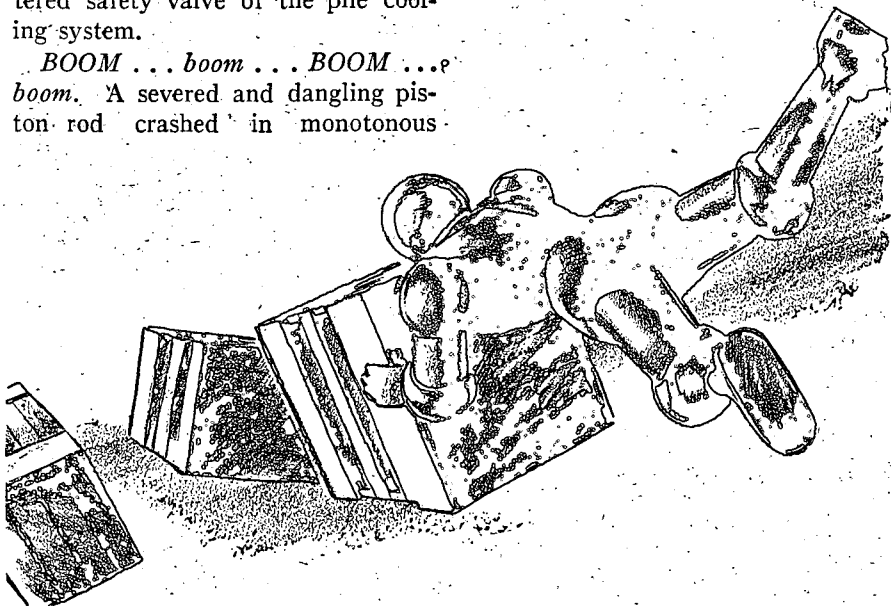
LIKE the sibilant, labored breathing of a dying monster, the tortured ship wailed its death sobs as it floundered in deep hyperstellar space.

Clank-sss, clank-sss, went the battered safety valve of the pile cooling system.

BOOM . . . boom . . . BOOM . . . boom. A severed and dangling piston rod crashed in monotonous

rhythm against a deck beam as the rest of the auxiliary compression unit strained to satisfy its function.

An off-beat bass viol strum added its depressive note to the symphony



of destruction's aftermath—*throom-throom . . . throom-throom*. It was the persistent expansion of plate metal reacting to heat from a ruptured tube jacket.

Forward, in the control compartment of the cargo craft, the sounds were muted. But the intervening bulkheads did not lessen their portent.

Brad Conally ran a hand over the stubbles on his cheek and swayed forward in the bucket-type seat, his head falling to rest against the control column.

Somewhere aft the ship groaned and metal scraped against metal with a sickening rending sound.

There was a lurch and Brad was jerked to one side, his head ramming against the inclination control. The ventral jet came to life in unexpected protest and fired once.

His hand shot out instinctively to return the loose, displaced lever to neutral. But the force of the single burst had already taken effect and the lower part of his stomach tied itself in a knot.

Centrifugal force reeled him to the fringe of consciousness. He struggled to reach the dorsal-ventral firing lever, praying that the linkage was not severed and the mechanism was still operative. His hand found the lever and jerked. The dorsal jet came to life with a roar. He jockeyed the control back and forth across neutral position. The two jets fired alternately. The sickening, end-over-end gyration became

gentler.

The ship steadied itself again into immobility. But a snap sounded from back aft. It was followed by a grating noise that crescendoed and culminated in a terrific crash. His ears popped. A *clang* reverberated, evidence of an automatic air-lock sealing off another punctured section of the vessel.

Shrugging fatigue from his body, he looked up at the panel. The massometer showed a decrease of six tons. The explanation was simple, Brad laughed dryly: A good one-quarter of his load of crated inter-calc audio retention banks had rammed-through the hull and floated into space.

He glanced at the scope. The twenty odd crates, some of them taking up an orbital relationship with the vessel, were blips on the screen.

Twisting the massometer section selector, he read off the figures. Hold One showed full cargo of inter-calc equipment. Hold Two, with its thirty bins of hematite, was intact. The third cargo compartment, containing more crated inter-calc units, was the damaged one. The massometer reading for that hold accounted for the missing weight.

“HOW'RE you doing, Brad?” the receiver rasped feebly. He recoiled at the unexpected sound.

“She's still in one piece, Jim,” he shouted to compensate for the strength—the signal would lose in

traveling the distance to the fleeing lifecraft. "Have you cleared through your second hyperjump yet?"

"Getting ready to go into the third. There won't be any more communicating after that . . . not with this short-range gear and your faulty transmitter. Find out the trouble yet?"

Brad ignored the question. "How long, Jim?" His voice was eager. "How long before you get to port?"

"Three jumps in one day. Seven more to go. That figures out to a little over two more days. I'm making better time than we expected with this peanut. Allow two more days for the slow tows to return . . . Still think it'll hold together?"

Brad was silent.

"Brad," Jim's voice went into low gear. "I've still got enough juice to come back and pick you up. After all, one ship and one load of cargo . . . it's just not worth it."

Brad listened to the ominous convulsions of the ship for a moment. "Your orders are to continue to Vega IV. I'm sticking."

"But, skipper! Dammit! There's always the chance of spilling through into normal! That's a torturous way to go!"

Brad's lips brushed roughly against the bulkhead mike. "If I fall through it's just me, isn't it?"

Although the sound level was too low, he knew there was a sigh on the other end. "Okay," the speaker whispered. "If I can't convince

you . . ."

Brad leaned against the bulkhead and shivered. He'd have to see whether he couldn't get more output from the heat converter—if he could chance going past the leaking pile again. Or *was* it the cold that was causing him to tremble?—If he entered normal space at less than minimum breakthrough speed . . . He didn't complete the distasteful mental picture.

He thought of his only functioning hyperdrive tube. Its gauge showed a power level that was only high enough to boost the craft back onto the hyper-space level when it started to conform with the normal tendency to fall through. How many times the tube could be counted on to repeat the performance he couldn't guess. It might be painful if he should let the drop gain too much momentum before correcting—human beings were built to cross the barrier in nothing longer than a micro-second. But, he resolved, he would worry about that when the time came.

"Why don't you let it go, Brad?" the voice leaped through the grating again.

Brad started. He thought Jim had cut the communication.

"You know the score. If we swing this we can get all of West Cluster Supplies' work. We'll need an extra ship—several of them. But with the contract we'll be able to borrow as much as we want."

Jim laughed. "At least I'm glad

there's a rational, mercenary motive. For a while I thought you were going through with that go-down-with-the-ship routine."

Boom . . . Boom . . . BOOM. The loose rod pounded with suddenly increasing fury.

He lunged through the hatch. At least the compression unit was forward of the faulty pile. And, while he did the job which automatic regulators had abandoned, he would not have to keep track of his time of exposure to hard radiation.

"CALLING Space Ship Fleury. Repeat: Calling Space Ship Fleury . . . Answer please."

Brad jerked his head off the panel ledge. Hot coffee from a container that his limp hand half-gripped sloshed over the brim and spilled on the deck. He turned a haggard, puzzled face to the bulkhead speaker.

It had flooded the compartment with sound—live, vibrant sound. The signal had been loud and clear. Not weak. Not like the one from Jim's lifecraft two jumps away.

"This is the SS Fleury!" he shouted, stumbling forward eagerly and gripping the gooseneck of the mike. "Come in!"

"Fleury from SS Cluster Queen . . . Answering your SOS."

His hopes suddenly vanished. "Is that Altman? What are you doing on this run?"

"Yeah, Conally. This is Altman. Freeholding to Vega . . . What's

your trouble? Anything serious?"

Altman had come in to unload at Arcturus II Spaceport while the Fleury was still docked, Brad recalled. The huge ship had been berthed next to his.

"Main drive jacket blown out in the engine compartment," Brad said hoarsely. "It happened at the end of the eighth jump. We're about a half-notch into hyper—just barely off the border."

"That's tough." There was little consolation in the tone. "Got any passengers?"

"No. None this trip. I'm solo now. My engineer's gone off in the craft."

"Can't you replace that jacket and limp through?"

"Got a faulty gasket on the replacement. Can't be patched up."

"You're in a helluva fix, Conally. Even a Lunar ferry pilot's got enough sense to check his spare parts before blastoff."

"I check mine after each landing. There isn't much that can happen to it when the pile's cold . . . Can you give me a tow, Altman?"

"Can't do that, Conally. I'm not . . ."

"If you'll just give me a boost then. To the crest of this hyper-jump. Then I won't have to worry about slipping through."

"Like I started to tell you," Altman intoned insistently, "one of my grapples is sheared."

"You still have two more."

"Uh-uh. This wise boy ain't gonna take a chance of a line snapping and knocking a hunk outta my hull. Especially when you got cargo spilling all over space."

Brad clenched his fists. He spoke through his teeth. "Look, Altman. Regulations say . . ."

" . . . I gotta help you," the other cut him short. "I know that, pal. That's why I happen to be stopping off at this not too enticing spot. And I'm offering help . . . Come aboard any time you want."

"And hang up a free salvage sign on the Fleury?"

Altman didn't answer.

Twisting the gooseneck in his hand, Brad sucked in a deep breath and blew it out in a rush. But he didn't say what had leaped into his mind. Instead he glanced over at the panel's screen.

Altman's ship showed up there—a large, greenish-yellow blip. There were other small dots on the scope too. As he looked, the large blip coasted over to one of the dots. The two became one mark on the screen.

"You're picking up my cargo!" Brad shouted.

"The stuff not in orbit around the Fleury ain't yours any longer, Conally," Altman laughed. "You oughta bone up on your salvage laws."

"You damned scavenger!"

"Now, now, Brad," the other said smoothly. "What would you do if you were in my position? Would

you let top priority cargo slip through to normal and get lost off the hyperlane? Or would you scoop it up and bring it in for bonus price?"

"You're not after a bonus," Brad roared into the mike. "You're after a contract . . . Altman, I'll pay two thousand for a ten-minute tow up-arc. That'll almost wipe out my profit on this haul."

"No sale."

Brad gripped the mike with both hands. "So you're just going to sit around and pick up cargo drop-pings!"

"The book says I gotta stick around until you come aboard, until you get underway on hyperpower, or until there just ain't any more ship or crew . . . Might as well pick up cargo; there's nothing else to do."

"And when I come aboard you'll want to unload the Fleury too, I take it."

"Wouldn't you?"

HALF the spilled crates were in close orbit around the SS Fleury. The tri-D scope showed that. Brad estimated distances of several of the objects as he clamped the helmet to the neckring of his suit and clattered to the pilot compartment airlock.

In the lock he unsnapped the hand propulsor from its bulkhead niche and clamped it to his wrist plate while the outer hatch swung open and the lock's air exploded into a void encrusted with a criss-

cross of vivid, vari-colored lines. flashed it to the deck.

The individual streaks, he estimated, averaged at least ten degrees in length. That indicated he was a reasonable period of time away from spillthrough into normal space where the lines would compress into the myriad normal pinpoints that were stars, undistorted by hyperspace perspective. When the streaks decreased to four or five degrees, he reminded himself, that was the time to start worrying about dropping out the bottom of the trough.

He waited until one of the square, tumbling objects rolled by, obscuring sections of the out-of-focus celestial sphere as it whirled in its orbit. Timing it, he waited for the box to complete another revolution. Just before it arrived the third time, he pushed off.

As he closed in on the crate, he knew his timing had been correct. He intercepted it directly above the hatch and clung clumsily to a hand ring as its greater mass swept him along in an altered orbit. A quick blast from his propulsor eliminated the rotation he had imparted to the object and he reoriented himself with respect to the ship. Spotting the ruptured sideplate where the cargo had burst through the hull, he steered his catch toward the hole with short bursts of power.

The bent plate made a natural ramp down which he slid the crate onto the gravity-fluxed deck. Inside, he degravitated the chamber, floated the box into position and double-

Pushing away from the ship again, he checked the length of the stellar grid streaks. They were still approximately ten degrees long. It looked hopeful. He might have time to collect all the orbiting cargo before he got dangerously close to spillthrough. Then he'd see about pushing on up-arc until the fuzzy streaks stretched to forty or fifty degrees—perhaps even ninety, if he could allow himself the luxury of wishful thinking. There he'd be at quartercrest and would have time to rest before worrying about being drawn down the arc again toward normal space.

While he jockeyed the fourth crate into the hold, a huge shadow suddenly blotched out part of the star lines off to the port side. It was the Cluster Queen pursuing a crate not in orbit around the Fluery. Brad shrugged; he'd be unable to pick up the ones that far out anyway.

But his head jerked upright in the helmet suddenly. If Altman was after a free box, he realized, the Cluster Queen *could not* appear in sharp outline to an observer in the Fluery system! The Fluery, sliding down the hyper-spatial arc with its orbiting crates, would be moving slowly toward normal space in response to the interdimensional pull exerted by its warp flux rectifier, hidden inaccessibly in the bowels of the pile, as it was on most outdated ships. But the free boxes, in

another time-space system with the Cluster Queen, would be stationary on the arc and would appear increasingly fuzzy as the planal displacement between the two systems became greater.

The truth, Brad realized, was that the Cluster Queen was drawing closer both spatially and on the descending node of the hyperspatial arc! Altman was violating the law; he was going to take the cargo in orbit. And he could well get away with it too, since it would be the word of only one man aboard the Fleury against the word of the entire crew of the Queen.

THERE were still six boxes in orbit. He pushed out again toward the closest and saw he had not been wrong in his reasoning. The Queen's outline was razor-edge sharp; it was close enough to stretch across fifty-five degrees of the celestial sphere.

He kept it in the corner of his vision as he hooked on to the crate and started back to the ship. The Queen was reversing attitude slowly. When he had first spotted it, it was approaching at an angle, nose forward. But now it had gyroed broadside and was continuing to turn as it drifted slowly toward Brad and the box.

"Altman!" he cried into his all-wave helmet mike. "You're on collision course!"

Brad kicked away from the crate and streaked back toward the

Fleury.

There was a laugh in the receiver. "Did you hear something, Bronson?"

"No, captain," another voice laughed. "For a moment I thought maybe I picked up a small blip near that crate. But I don't guess Conally would be stupid enough to suit up and try to hustle his own cargo."

Brad activated his propulsor again and gained impetus in his dash for the Fleury's hatch.

"Still," Altman muttered, "it seems like I heard somebody say something about a collision course."

The Cluster Queen was no longer turning. It had stabilized, with its tubes pointed in the general direction of the Fleury and her floating crates.

Perspiration formed on Brad's forehead as he glanced up and saw the other ship steady itself, settling on a predetermined, split-hair heading. Somebody, he realized grimly, was doing a good job of aiming the vessel's stern.

He got additional speed out of his propulsor, but the tubes swung slowly as he covered more of the distance to his hatch. It seemed he couldn't escape his position of looking up into the mouths of the jets.

"I don't know, boss," the speaker near his ear sounded again. "Maybe he is out there."

"We better not take chances, then," Altman was not hiding the heavy sarcasm in his words. "Blast away!"

Brad kicked sideways, stiffened his arm and hit the wrist jet full force. He shot to one side on a course parallel with the Fleury.

A blinding gusher of raw energy exploded—a cone of blistering, scintillating force that streaked through space between himself and the disabled ship. The aiming was perfect. Had he not swerved off when he did, had he stayed on his original course, he would have been in the center of the lance of hell-power.

As he drifted shakily into the hatch, the Queen wasn't even a dot against the trellis of star traces. But, while he looked, a miniature lance of flame burst in the general direction in which Altman's vessel had gone—scores of miles away! He was maneuvering a standard turn to approach again, Brad realized.

If he repeated the performance against the hull of the Fleury, he would shake things up considerably, but at least the alloy of the plates could stand the heat—possibly the thrust too . . . but not for long.

INVIGORATING effects of hot coffee flowed through Brad as he sat strapped in the pilot's seat and allowed himself the luxury of a cigarette.

But his eyes were fastened on the screen. The Cluster Queen was drawing up to the last orbiting crate. He watched the large blip and the dot become one.

Abruptly, there was motion in the

direct-view port—overhead. The Queen and the crate drifted into view. He switched his gaze from the screen and watched grapples clamp the crate like giant mandibles, drawing it into the Queen.

His chest and abdomen hurt and he wanted to get out of the seat and stretch, move around, do something. But that might be disastrous. If Altman was going to play any more tricks with his tubes, he would be ready to do it now, after the last box had been retrieved. And Brad realized it wouldn't be healthy being shaken around inside an erratically spinning compartment.

"That's the last one, Altman," he spoke dully into the mike.

"Say!" The irony was still in the other's voice. "Were you out there when we blasted to avoid collision?"

Brad said nothing.

"Sorry if we warmed your tail," Altman continued. "But you should'a stayed inside. Our instruments show you're getting close to spillthrough. Ain't you gonna do anything about it?"

Brad snapped to alertness. Now he realized the origin of the pains in his stomach and chest—the pinprick sensations that seemed to be spreading throughout his flesh. He glanced out the direct-view port. Altman was right. The sky was no longer a grid of star streaks. The lines had shrunk; their lengths now stretched scarcely over three or four degrees. The scope showed the Queen was still there spatially,

but the fuzziness of her outline indicated she was well-out of danger—high up on the ascending node of the arc.

"What's on the program, Altman?" Brad asked bitterly. "Let me guess . . . I slip through the barrier. Passage at slow speed makes pretty much of a pulpy mess out of my body. You pop the Queen through in a milli-second . . . You got a nice story to tell: You arrived as I was slipping through. You couldn't do anything to stop me. You plunged through after me. With a dead skipper aboard, the ship and cargo were free to the first one who came along. You took the cargo, it being high priority stuff. You left the ship, it being outdated, battered, useless and drifting in normal interstellar where it would never be found. You took what was left of the skipper, it being good evidence to substantiate your tale."

"Now Brad, boy!" Altman stretched the words out in mock reprimand. "You know *I* wouldn't do a thing like *that*. You know the West Cluster contract doesn't mean *that* much to *me*!"

There was a long silence. Apparently Altman wasn't going to interrupt it. Brad looked back at the scope. The Queen had withdrawn spatially and hyperspatially.

The pains in his body rose sharply and he grimaced, biting down on his lips. A knife slipped into his abdomen, twisted and shot up through his chest and into his head.

Then an incendiary bomb went off somewhere in his stomach.

He reached for the control of the good main hyperjet. Then, as his face contorted with near agony, he punched down on it.

The pain left swiftly. The ship rattled and clanked and ground hatefully, its new cacophony of protest drowning out the old *clank-sss*, *boom* and *throom-throom*. The small blurs in the sky elongated—five degrees, ten, twelve, twenty, twenty-five, forty . . . The Cluster Queen's outline on the scope became sharp and then faded into fuzziness once more as the Fleury passed it hyperspatially along the ascending node of the arc.

He pressed the normal drive jet lever and it spluttered weakly, creating not even enough discordant sounds in the wracked ship to drown out the *boom*, *throom*, *clank-sss* symphony. The dot on the scope representing the Queen faded into insignificance. With a sweep of his hand, he killed power in the automatic distress transmitter.

Now it would take the Queen a little while to get a bearing on him along four co-ordinates. It would be a reprieve of several hours—even the Fleet ships couldn't do it in less time than that without a signal to home in on.

He had no idea what the skipper of the Queen would do next. But at the moment he wasn't interested. The sharp pains were gone. But they had been replaced by an un-

controllable, reactive nausea. He unclamped his safety harness and stumbled to the jettison bin, holding a hand over his mouth. He made it just in time.

Then he dropped onto the bunk, exhausted.

THE reprieve gained by his elusive tactics must have been a long one. When Brad awoke he felt fresher than he had at any time since the engine compartment eruption. He had no way of knowing how long he had slept; the secondary bus bar off which the ship's clocks operated had gone up in the initial blast when a section of the plate from the ruptured tube jacket had smashed through the junction box.

Evenly spaced *swooshing* sounds were emitting from the speaker. That, he realized, was what had awakened him. Someone was blowing into a mike to see if it was alive.

"SS Fleury, SS Fleury, SS Fleury," the sounds were suddenly exchanged for words—Altman's.

Brad swung his legs out of the bunk and stood swaying, rubbing a hand over his chafed, bearded face.

The elongated blip was back on the radar screen—clear, close.

"Answer, Conally," the receiver barked.

Brad strode to the panel and looked out the direct-view port. He had slept longer than he had at first suspected. The stellar trellis had shortened considerably. They

were back in the neighborhood of fifteen degrees.

"Distress Regulation Four-Oh-Eight-Two," the speaker droned, "says that if a disabled ship don't answer by radio or visually within fifteen minutes after being called steadily, standby craft is to board it and may take immediate possession."

"What do you want, Altman?" Brad said resignedly into the mike.

Altman hissed irritably. "Conally, there's no sense in playing hide-n-seek with the little power you've got left. Get off that damned piece of junk and come aboard."

"Go to hell."

"Listen! I'm tired of wasting time! If you don't . . ."

"I'll sign a release and shoot it over to you. That's all you need to clear you of rescue and standby responsibility. I'll keep my distress signal off until you get out of range."

"Uh-uh. It ain't as simple as that. I want your cargo. And I'm going to get it. Now let's be sensible. You know you don't have a chance."

"Maybe I've learned a few tricks."

The other snarled impatiently. "Okay, bright boy. I've had enough of this horseplay. I'm gonna let you see just the way things are . . . Notice anything odd? Any peculiar noises aboard the Fleury?"

BRAD cocked his head toward the stern. The complaining

clanks and groans and off-beat thumpings maintained their steady rhythm. There were some new noises.

"I been listening to it get louder for the past three hours," Altman hinted.

Then Brad's ears picked it up—an erratic, excited *clackety-clack-clackety-clack*. He gasped.

Altman laughed. "That counter's setting up quite a sing-song, ain't it? I sorta think that pile might go *boom* in a few hours. But I'm hoping I can get your cargo aboard before then. You can come too if you want."

Brad swung swiftly and lunched for the passageway aft.

"Wish I was there to help you with the cad rod insertions," the laughing voice raced after him.

The dial on the forward side of the shielded bulkhead read Oh-Oh-point-Oh-Two-Four. He applied the figure to the adjacent graph and learned he could remain in the engine compartment for one minute and fourteen seconds, with a safety factor of ten per cent. In that period of time, he rationalized, he ought to be able to insert a sufficient number of cadmium control rods to bring the pile under control.

The counter clicked gratingly overhead as he undogged the hatch, swung it open and lunged into the steam-tormented acrid compartment.

He broke open the first locker and jerked the remaining three cad

rods from their racks. Coughing and waving smoke from in front of his face, he swung open the door of the first reserve compartment.

It was empty!

The second reserve compartment was empty too, as were the two emergency compartments. Only three cadmium rods when he needed at least three dozen!

In a rapid dash around the pile block, he inserted the rods at spaced intervals in their slots. At least they would mean a few hours' grace. As he slid the last rod in he cursed himself and swore that if he ever commanded another ship he would not leave it unmanned at the dock—specifically if there was somebody like Altman berthed anywhere at the same spaceport.

The ruptured hypertube jacket, he wondered suddenly, not losing his count of seconds. It seemed unlikely now that it had let go as a result of defective material. He stepped to the flange that connected it with the stern bulkhead.

The tube, inactivated immediately after the blowout, was cold. He looked where his suspicions directed . . . The aperture control valve had been readjusted! It had been displaced a full fifteen degrees on the topside of optimum power! A cunning setting—one that would trap and concentrate enough residual di-ions at normal power output to cut loose somewhere between the fifth and tenth jump.

He thought, too, of his trans-

mitter that hadn't been powerful enough to reach farther than a couple of jumps since he had left spaceport. When, he asked himself, had Altman's radioman worked on it?

AFTER he slammed the hatch and dogged it, he leaned against the thick metal for a long while. The *clack-clack* overhead was somewhat pacified. But it wouldn't remain that way long. He quelled the fear sensations that were racing through him and tried to think.

How long? How long had it been since Jim left? He was three jumps away a few hours ago—or was it longer than that?—and he still had seven to go or was it six? Had it been just a few hours ago, or was it days? He had slept some—twice, he believed—since then. But for how long? And if the tow ships did make it back in time, would they have spare rods?

He gave it up as a hopeless speculation and started back up the passageway, shoulders drooping.

Karoom!

The new sound reverberated through the agonized vessel and the bulkheads of the passageway shuddered in fanatic sympathy with it.

The deck shifted crazily beneath his feet and a port beam—the bulkhead and the rest of the ship following it—swung over to crash into his shoulder.

A stabbing pain shot up his arm as he slid down the tilting wall and

landed in the right angle between the deck and the bulkhead.

Massaging the torn ligament in his arm, he sat up and swayed dizzily in resonance with the pendulum-like motion of the vessel. Then he struggled to his feet and stood upright—one foot planted at an angle against the deck and the other against the port bulkhead. Overhead was the corresponding juncture made by the ceiling plate and the starboard bulkhead.

Nausea welled as he tried to adjust to the new, perverted up and down references. He didn't have to wonder what had happened. The starboard grav coil that ran under the overheated converter, he knew, had finally shorted out. The port coil was still operating normally. He considered turning it off, but conceded it was better to struggle around in an apparently listing ship than to be wracked by the nausea of weightlessness.

Straddling the deck and port bulkhead, he waddled back to the hatchway, threw a leg over its edge and lifted himself into the control compartment, sliding down the floor to the port side. He worked his way to the control seat, readjusted its tilt and crawled in it.

Then he tore a strip out of his jacket and wrapped it around his shoulder as tightly as he could. The pressure eased the pain in his aching muscle.

The air gauge showed an almost normal Two-Nine-point-Three-Two

pounds, sufficient oxygen content, and a satisfactory circulatory rate. He eagerly fished a cigarette from his jacket. He had earned it, he assured himself.

While he smoked he counted on the screen the amount of cargo that had spilled out when the loose crates had lurched with the vessel. Almost as fast as he counted it, the Cluster Queen swooped down on it and scooped it into her hatch.

Numbed, he found he could no longer react to the total disregard of his rights with any degree of excited resentment. He closed his eyes indifferently. Shuddering, he squeezed the cylinder of tobacco between his fingers without being aware of the action. The glowing end bent back and burned his knuckle.

Tossing the cigarette away, he realized suddenly his fight was futile. He couldn't possibly hold out until Jim returned, or in the hope that some other vessel would happen along. The pile, his arm, spill-through, the Fleury threatening to break in two . . . he enumerated all the factors.

If he went aboard the Cluster Queen now, Altman would at least give him passage to port. Any charges Brad would make would never hold up without substantiation. And Altman would see that he brought nothing with him that could back up the accusations. It would be just as easy for the crew of the Queen to prove that Brad Conally had conceived the whole

weird account of assault and piracy as a means of winning back the cargo he was faced with losing.

He knew, however, that no matter what happened, he could kiss the Fleury goodbye. Altman would never allow it to reach port. There might be evidence aboard—perhaps evidence as simple as finger prints—to prove that Altman or one of his crew had tampered with the machinery.

Brad reached out to extend the gooseneck of the mike toward him.

BUT the stellar grid showing through the direct-view port was blotted out suddenly. He jerked his gaze to the scope. The Queen was overhead—almost within grappling distance!

He started to shout out, but at the same time brilliant hell exploded outside.

The Cluster Queen's jetwash raked across the upper bow of the Fleury, throwing its nose down and its tail up and over in a hateful, wrenching spin.

The spin continued, losing none of its neck-snapping vehemence, as the Queen burst off into space. The harness cut across Brad's aching arm and set up a new, rending torture. But his good arm shot out and found the forward belly jet lever.

With what mushily reacted like the last erg of energy in the normal drive converter tanks, the jet responded feebly. He nursed the

power carefully, determined not to waste juice through overcorrection. Finally the Fleury steadied and resumed immobility of attitude.

"Sorry, Conally," Altman apologized with exaggerated concern. "But her majesty's acting up frisky-like. Can't seem to do much with her . . . Maybe if you came aboard we might find some way to quiet her down. How about it?"

Brad bit his lips and tightened his good fist until fingernails knifed into the palm. "No, damn you!" he shouted with all the volume his lungs could muster.

He summoned all the spacewise epithets any stevedore or crewman had ever used, added a few he imagined no one had thought of before, and held them in abeyance until Altman would answer.

But no sound came out of the speaker.

The reason was apparent on the scope. A half dozen of the massive crates had crashed through the hull—this time out of hold number One, the massometer showed—and the Cluster Queen was on her way to take them aboard.

But he was more concerned with another complication. The red power utilization indicator of the good hypertube was in motion, swinging back to zero on its dial. He saw the flicker of the needle in the corner of his vision.

He checked the suspicion against the blips on the scope and obtained verification . . . the outlines of the

Queen and the crates were fuzzy, despite the fact they were still nearby spatially. The fuzziness could only result from the Fleury's being removed hyperspatially from that vicinity.

He had accidentally touched the hyperjet lever while applying normal power to correct the three-dimensional spin. Which way had he moved it? Had he gone further into hyperspace? Or had he fallen further down the descending node toward spillthrough?

Studying sensations in his body for an indication of abnormal pain, he stared abruptly out the view port. The twisting pain was there—inside his chest. The star lines were short.

He swore and scowled at his luck.

Then, as the pain intensified, he grasped the lever of the hyperjet again and thrust it forward. The tube sputtered feebly, came on full force for a second, sputtered again and was silent.

He jerked the lever back and forth on the forward side of neutral and rammed it desperately all the way forward. The tube coughed, grabbed once more for a moment, and sputtered out. He goosed it four more times, but only got two boosts as a result. Then he twisted it past the stop to the first emergency position. It wheezed, fired for two seconds and died.

Sweat forming in beads on his face, he ignored the pain in his shoulder and reached to the control

column with his injured arm. He swung back the second safety stop bar out of the way and rammed the lever all the way forward.

The tube fired for another second, but that was all. He had used the last erg.

But how much time had he bought with his final means of retreat from the spillthrough trough? He checked the celestial crisscrosses . . . Not much . . .

ALTMAN? he wondered suddenly. Where was the Cluster Queen? It wasn't showing up on the scope any longer. Neither were the crates. Had he retrieved them and shoved off? Brad jiggled the scope's brilliance control, wondering whether it was faulty and was simply not registering the Queen.

An abrupt *thud*, coincident with a sharp jar throughout the ship and a sudden shifting of the pseudogravitational field almost to normal, brought him upright in his seat. He realized immediately what was happening.

He hadn't been able to pick up the Queen on the scope because it was too close to register as a blip separate from the central luminescence on the screen which was representative of the Fleury itself. Altman had maneuvered alongside, aligned the hatch flanges of the two ships and activated his magnetic grapples. The nearness of his grav coils had restored some of the Fleury's internal stability. He was pre-

paring to board the Fleury. He would be aboard within ten minutes . . . It took that long to make minute adjustments in order to insure perfect superimposition of the flange surfaces.

Brad smiled grimly and unsnapped his harness with nervous fingers. If he could get into his suit in time, it would be simple to open a hatch aft and let the air spill from the Fleury. Then when Altman undogged the inner hatch of the Fleury's air lock, it would be sucked open violently and pull the skipper of the Cluster Queen into a vacuum. It would make a mess out of the air lock and the control compartment—but that would be advantageous. It would be evidence to prove at least that Altman had taken the initiative in boarding the Fleury without first dispatching his intention of doing so to the nearest port, as required by the law.

Brad planned that if he then found the Queen's locks dogged, he would temporarily close the Fleury's inner lock and fill the between-ships passage with normal pressure air so he would be able to open the Queen's hatches against the thirty-pound pressure in the other ship. After opening her hatches, he would leap back to the Fleury's inner hatch, release the single doglatch and let the vacuum suck all the air from the other ship too. He would immediately report the defensive action to Vega IV, borrow emergency cad rods from the Queen, prevent an internal

pile blast aboard the Fleury and withdraw the crippled ship, together with its engine compartment evidence, to the node of the arc to await the arrival of investigators.

He clamped the helmet on his neck ring with a minute to spare as he reassured himself it was a perfect plan and had a reasonable chance to success. It was one too that required no physical exertion. He couldn't go through any rough stuff with his sprained arm.

STIFFENING, he watched the first of the six doglatches on the hatch swing to the unlocked position. He moved over against the starboard bulkhead, well away from the hatch. He would have to get out of the suit again, and it would be a messy job if he were standing close to Altman when the vacuum went to work on him.

The final doglatch unsnapped. The hatch crashed open and he imagined he could almost hear the swoosh of escaping air.

Instead he heard a mocking voice over his audio.

"You were right, captain," the voice laughed.

"Who'd think Conally would try a trick like that?" Altman taunted, extending a spacesuit clad leg across the hatch ledge.

"You would and did . . . He'll probably be right behind the hatch to the left there, boss."

Brad sprang forward.

But Altman turned suddenly in

his direction and pointed a gun at Brad's stomach. It checked the attack. Brad backed away hopelessly.

"Okay," Altman jerked his head in the confines of the helmet, "go to work."

The crewman from the Queen stepped into the control cabin and walked toward the passageway aft while Altman held the gun on Brad.

"Think you can do it quick enough?" Altman asked the crewman. "Radiation, you know."

The crewman thrust the wide-mouthed gun above his shoulder where Altman could see it. "It'll just take one shot with this."

He disappeared down the passageway.

"Hell, captain," the voice sounded a minute later. "It's dead. He musta used up all his reserve juice in that last surge upward."

"Okay," Altman smiled—a weird, distorted smile as seen through the thick, rounded helmet. "Come on back." He looked at Brad. "So you can't pull away from the trough any longer? That's tough."

Brad wanted to say, Okay, Altman, I'll go aboard the Queen with you. But he didn't. He realized the plea would have been futile anyway as he watched the crewman rejoin Altman and heard the latter say: "Just think, Conally, you could have come aboard. I would have let you a while back. But you've made this thing too tough and gave my boys the chance to convince

me we might have slipped up somewhere and you might be able to prove your side of the story."

The pair retreated to the air lock. Brad stood motionless, staring, not breathing.

"The pile'll hold," the crewman announced, "for another four hours, just about."

"Fine!" Altman exclaimed. "This junk'll slip through within an hour. That'll give us another three hours, at least, to get this stiff aboard the Queen and transfer cargo before she blows. Then we can mop up on whatever crates we've . . ."

But the air lock closed and the rest of his words were cut off.

IF he could only get cleaned up before it came. If he could only enjoy the luxury of a bath, a shave, clean clothes. Brad laughed at the last item, wondering how clothes could be expected to remain clean if they were on someone making the spillthrough transition at coasting speed.

The Fleury lurched as the Queen cut loose and blasted away. Brad had watched the pressure gauge climb back to normal and was removing his helmet at the time. The ship's one-sided gravity field caught hold unexpectedly and he toppled to the deck rolling to the port bulkhead. His hurt shoulder rammed into metal and new pain knifed into existence as the heavy helmet clattered down and crashed against his head. The blow almost stunned

him. But it left him with enough awareness to wish it *had* knocked him insensible—permanently insensible.

The scope showed more cargo had spilled out in the last lurch. The Queen started over toward the crates, but coasted past, turned and came back to take post spatially alongside the disabled craft. Already the other ship's outline was beginning to blur as the Fleury slipped away from her hyperspatially—down the arc.

Brad straddle-stepped on the deck and bulkhead to the control column and broke out his pack of cigarettes. Suddenly his feet left the deck. The port grav coil had gone out; he realized grimly, the current having dropped below the minimum requirements. For a moment he became concerned over weightlessness. Then he cut in the heel magna-grips of his suit and clanged onto the floor. At least, he wasn't confronted with a topsy-turvy ship any longer. He blew a cloud of smoke into the air and half-centered his attention on the scope. Two more crates had left the Fleury's holds. With the grav fields out on the ship, they did not take up orbit. They just floated away, at an almost imperceptible speed. But the Queen was still apparently not interested in picking them up. There would be plenty of time to do that; right now she must stick close to the Fleury spatially, Brad realized, so her instruments would indicate the

moment the spillthrough to normal space occurred, so her crew could get to work.

As though hypnotized in inconsequential thought, he watched the crates slowly draw away. Almost incredibly expensive cargo. Cargo that Altman would surely not allow to go unrecovered. Even as booty, the crated equipment would bring every bit of what it was worth. But Altman would see that they were delivered—every one of them. A contract with West Cluster meant a good deal more than the face value of the one shipment of intercalc banks.

Brad started and his face became alive with expression as a sudden realization drove home. It was followed almost immediately by a second jarring consideration. He tossed away the half-consumed cigarette.

It wasn't more than fifteen minutes later when he stood before the mike again.

"Altman," he called out.

Silence.

"Altman," he shouted louder.

"Go ahead and answer him, captain. Let's see what he has to say."

"You can't come aboard, Conally," Altman said finally.

"If you don't let me come aboard, I'll slip through and be killed."

"Ain't that touching!"

"You mean you won't pick me up?"

"We'll pick you up all right—we wanna take what's left of you back

to show how you died."

"It's like that, then? You're going to kill me to get the cargo?"

"You're learning fast."

"Are you going to hook on to the Fleury and drag her in to port?"

"Are you nuts? The inspectors could easily find out that we worked her over before you left port . . . What's the matter—got a sentimental attachment for that old crate?"

"Look, Altman . . ."

"Go to hell, Conally."

The background hum died out of the Fleury's receiver abruptly. Brad called twice. But there was no answer.

THE SS Fleury was vibrant with the final pounding of its weakening vital parts.

Clank-sss, clank-sss, the coolant's safety valve hissed. *Boom . . . boom*, the jangling piston rod pounded. The expanding metal plate added its *throom-throom* note.

The counter in the passageway *clackety-clacked* louder.

Their lines snapped by persistent tremors and lurches, more crates danced in the holds. Some of them eventually found their way to the gaping holes in the hull and, receiving a final, brief kick from jagged metal, floated lightly out into space.

In the scope of the Cluster Queen, the Fleury's outline became fuzzier.

With mounting groans, the tortured vessel wrenched violently as she slipped down the descending arc.

Then suddenly she was through—in normal space where stars shown with pinpoint brilliancy and where the celestial sphere was no longer a lazy, crazy crisscross of blurred lines.

The Cluster Queen started a wide hyperspatial turn, remaining spatially alongside the Fleury. She gathered speed as she swung around and straightened out and, with hyperjets blasting full force, plunged through the barrier in somewhat less time than a milli-second.

Ahead, the Fleury was picked up immediately on the scope. Like a hawk, the Queen closed the distance to the other trembling, silent ship.

VEGA IV's spaceport was bathed in brilliant, blue-cast light from the magnificent sun.

The Cluster Queen was docked. A tractor kept itself busy rolling up the ramp into the ship and out again with huge crates that were apparently in somewhat poorer condition than when they left Arcturus II. An occasional splintered board jutted outward, held to its box only by loose nails.

Three men were next to the hold's hatch. They stood grouped about an elongated form that lay on the concrete apron, covered with a white square of linen. A spacesuit clad arm jutted out under one side of the covered square.

"We'll take you over to the office," Inspector Graham was saying. "You'll have to make out an

affidavit, you know. We'll need a couple of your crewmen to verify it."

"Be glad to," Altman answered. "Any time you're ready."

"As soon as they pick up—Conally," the inspector looked down at the form.

"I don't understand it," Jim muttered, rubbing a thumb and forefinger over closed eyelids.

"*Maybe I've got a version that's easier to understand, Jim,*" the voice sounded forcefully from the direction of the hatch.

Inspector Graham and Altman spun around.

Jim didn't have to. He was facing the hatch.

Altman blanched; backed away; stopped, and held his ground.

"Brad!" Jim shouted unbelievably and rushed forward to grasp his arms as the Fleury's skipper leaped off the side of the ramp. He was haggard but smiling.

"Who's this?" the inspector asked.

"This is Conally, the skipper of the Fleury," Jim explained jubilantly.

The inspector started, looked at the form on the apron, back at Brad, then at Altman.

"A trick!" Altman cried hoarsely. "I see it all, inspector. It's a damned trick! I've been roped in!"

He was putting on a rather good act, Brad thought. But he went along with his story anyway. As Brad unfolded the incidents of sabotage, threat, assault, refusal to as-

sist, pirating cargo, plotting murder and disregard of Space Code Regulations, he watched Altman gain more control over himself.

"I realized about an hour before spillthrough," Brad was approaching the end of his account, "that the Fleury was no longer holding the spilled cargo in an orbit because its grav system wasn't working. Whatever crates broke free from the holds also broke free from the ship's system and were no longer being dragged down the descending node toward spillthrough. They were remaining stationary on the arc—where Altman was sure to pick them up.

"Your spacesuit, Jim, came in handy. Without it, nothing could have been done. I just filled it up with anything I could find—extra clothing, insulation from the ruptured tube, a few utensils. It didn't make any difference. The crew members who would handle the "body" would believe it felt as torn apart as any other space suited body that experienced spillthrough at a snail's pace.

"To add weight, I broke open a bin of hermatite and poured about a hundred pounds or so of the stuff into the suit. I stirred it gently; got more hematite—red ocher, you know—and half-filled the helmet. We had enough control column oil left to wet it down rather thoroughly. The new mixture had a rich, dark-red color, just like I thought it would. I sloshed the goo around

in the helmet so all the inner surface was coated with the mixture and with small bits of indistinguishable odds and ends; then I clamped the dome onto the suit and harnessed it in the pilot's seat.

"I put on my own helmet again, went aft and crawled into a half-busted crate. With the wrist propulsor, I jockeyed the thing out of the hold to make damned sure it would break free of the Fleury's system and wouldn't spill through with the ship. After I saw I was drifting off, I worked my way well into the bracing between the crate and the inter-calc unit so I couldn't be seen through the broken sections of the box.

"Sure enough—about three hours later, along comes grabbenheimer," he threw a thumb in Altman's direction, "with his grapples. I was able to squeeze out of the suit an hour or so after that. But I've been cramped up in that crate for two days, with only emergency rations."

ALTMAN loosed a sarcastic laugh and turned to the inspector. "It's a damned clever trick, inspector!" he shouted. "I been grappled in on the scheme . . . Like I said, I arrived when he was slipping through. I couldn't do anything to stop it. Naturally I wasn't going to let the cargo go to waste. Naturally I was going to bring back what I thought was his body—regulations say I gotta do that.

"But he knew for a couple of hours that I was coming in answer to his SOS. I had gotten a fix on the point where he was slipping through and he was certain I would follow the Fluery through to normal space, pick up his body and the cargo that was aboard and go back into hyper to get the rest of the cargo. He had time to make all those preparations. So he dreams up the scheme of hiding in with the cargo that's free in hyper and telling this story later. You see . . ."

Brad laughed. "Your tongue's working a little too fast, Altman. When I picked the crate I was going to ride in, I picked a very special one. The tractor's bringing it out now." He pointed to the ramp. Part of the space suit was visible through the splintered side of the box.

"That crate," he continued, "will carry more weight as evidence than the oaths of all your crewmen on a pile of Bibles stacked from here to Arcturus."

Altman frowned puzzledly.

Jim and the inspector looked at

each other.

"Inside is one of West Cluster's integrator-calculator audio retention banks," Brad explained. "It took only ten minutes to hook leads from the bank input to the intercommunication jackbox in the hold and to switch it in on the radio voice system. With that setup, everything said on the voice radio afterward spilled over into the retention bank. The only reason why I held that final conversation with you was to get you to repeat what you had done and were planning."

Brad turned to Graham. "How about it inspector? Do you think the courts will see that we get compensation for the loss of the Fleury?"

"The least you'll get," Graham said, "is the Cluster Queen."

Brad looked up appraisingly at the massive vessel. "She ought to do as security on a loan to cover the purchase of two or three other spaceworthy freighters to go with her. Wouldn't you think so, Jim? —That'd make a nice nucleus for a fleet!"

THE END

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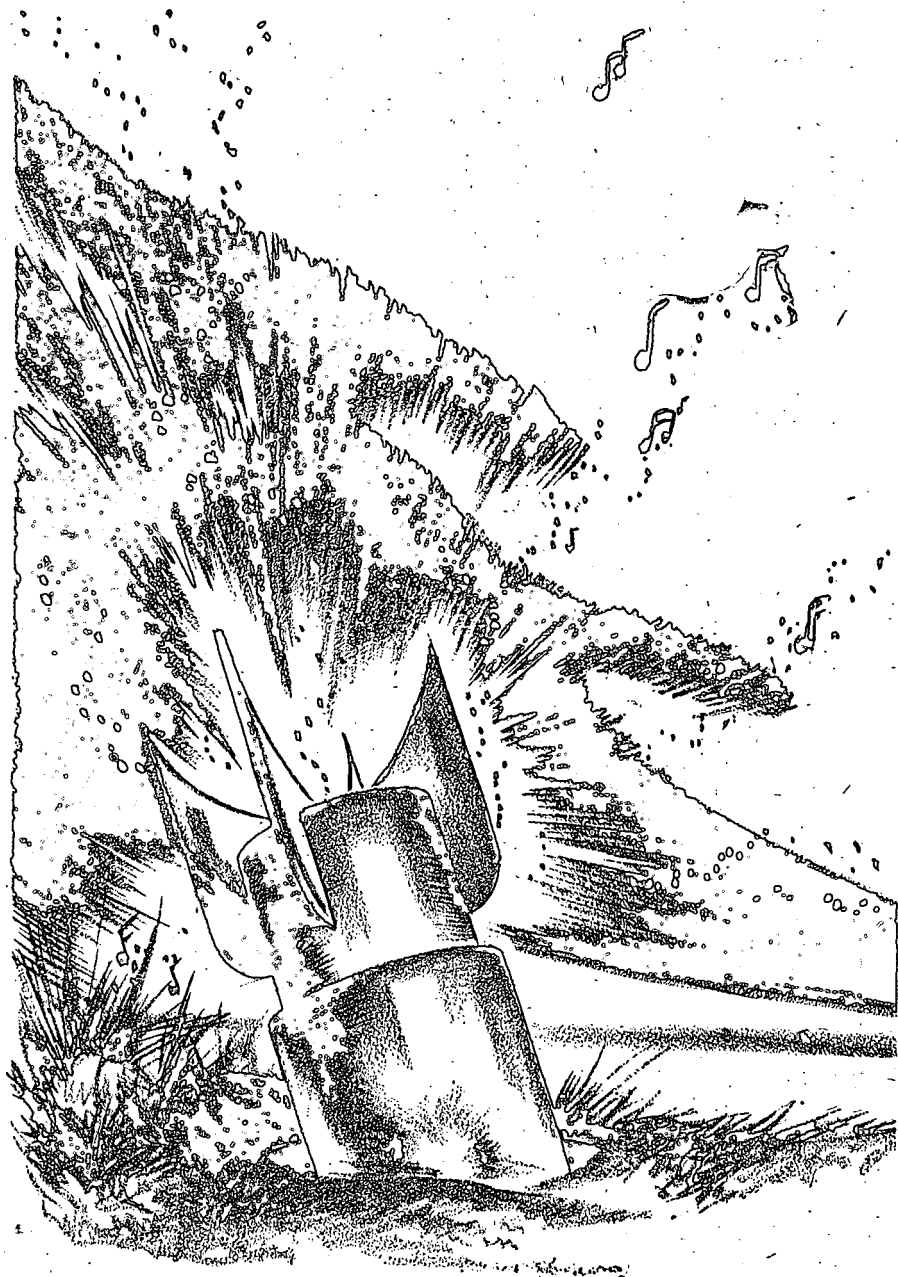
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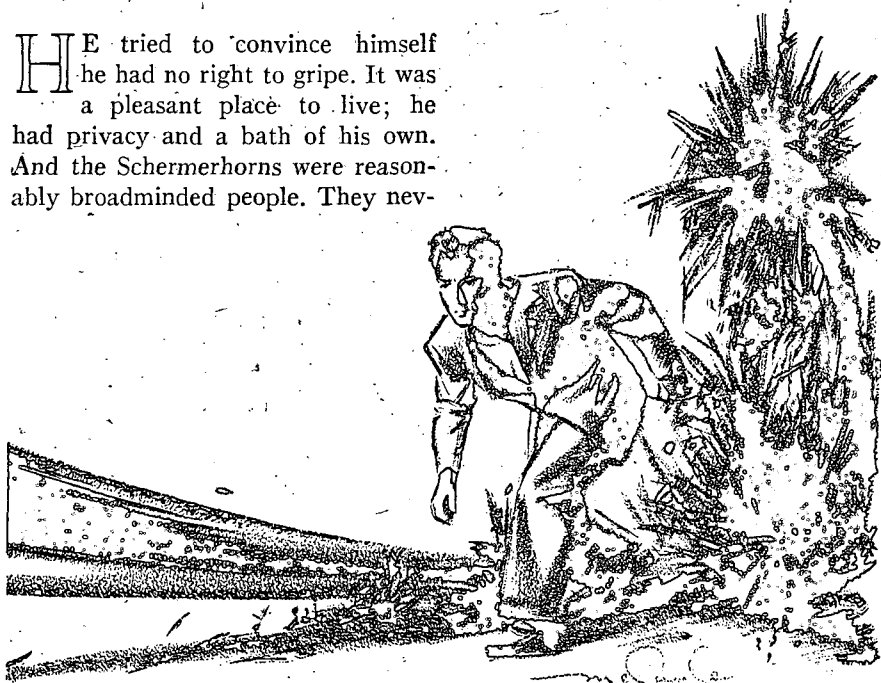


ADOLESCENTS ONLY

by
Irving Cox, Jr.

Elvin wasn't sure how it had started—maybe it was the Schermerhorn twins—or the mysterious "meteorite"—or else the world had gone crazy . . .

HE tried to convince himself he had no right to gripe. It was a pleasant place to live; he had privacy and a bath of his own. And the Schermerhorns were reasonably broadminded people. They nev-



As he cautiously approached the alien object, it seemed as if a soft melody were being wafted on the night breeze. The sound made him nervous and instilled fear . .

er objected to his smoking or an occasional glass of beer. Last year at the Neuhavens' — Gary Elvin cringed inwardly at the recollection.

Just the same, this was going too far. It was enough to endure their kids all day long, five days of the week, without the addition of these juvenile parties. This one had started an hour after dinner and it was still going strong when Elvin returned from the late show at the Fox.

Naturally the Schermerhorn twins were popular tenth graders — husky, blond Greek Gods who had everything, including a red Convertible and a swimming pool Pop Schermerhorn had built for them at the ranch. Gary Elvin had expected a certain number of parties when he decided to board and room with the Schermerhorns, but hardly one every weekend.

He fled through the cluttered hall where a buxom lass was organizing something called a bubble gum contest and took refuge on the damp and deserted patio. He flung himself on a wet, canvas lounge, and looked up at the bright night sky.

Bitterly he counted off the weeks. It was still early in November. He had eight more months to endure before June came with its temporary illusion of escape. As he always did, Elvin resolved to find a better job next year. He had been teaching for five years now. He knew all the tricks of classroom control and smooth community relations. Surely

if he started looking early enough, he ought to be able to get something at a small college . . .

Suddenly he was jerked back to reality by a curious spot of red that appeared in the sky. It moved closer and he saw that it was a falling object followed by a long plume of red flame. It flashed momentarily overhead and Elvin heard a dull thud as it fell into a field beyond the ranch house.

He sprang up from the couch and moved off in the darkness. It had been a meteorite, of course; if it had survived the friction of the atmosphere it would make an interesting exhibit for the science classroom. Miss Gerken would be glassy-eyed with pleasure.

There was no moon. As soon as he crossed the driveway, Elvin stumbled over the damp furrows of a newly ploughed field. He was sweating when he reached the row of palms that lined the irrigation ditch. He paused to wipe his face.

And he heard a weird, shrill, rhythmic sound. It might have been called music, but there was no definable melody or beat. It was faint at first, but as he moved to the right, paralleling the ditch, the sound came louder.

Then, beyond the trees, in a glow of blue light emanating from the thing itself, he saw the rocket. It was not quite five feet long, a slim projectile of glowing metal nosed deeply into the soft earth. The four fins were rotating slowly.

Gary Elvin might, quite properly, have been frightened, but he was totally unacquainted with modern fiction dealing with the probable potentials of science and the universes beyond the earth. Such material he classified, along with comic books and television, as the pap of mediocre minds.

Now, when he first saw the rocket, he came to the somewhat prosaic conclusion that it had strayed from the government experimental site at Muroc. He walked closer. The glow of the metal brightened; the slow rotation of the fins and the weird music became hypnotic. For a moment Elvin felt a surge of fear. He tried to turn away, but he could not.

Instead, moving against his will, he took two of the fins in his hands and, pulled on them. The rotation and the music stopped as the tail-piece of the rocket fell open. Elvin's mind cleared as he looked into a tiny chamber capped by a small rectangular sheet of metal which was dotted with tiny globes of a translucent material. Gingerly he picked up the seal.

As he touched the metal, a strange sensation, like a flood of jumbled words, tumbled through his mind. The feeling was neither unpleasant nor frightening. He was tempted to relax and enjoy it; and he would have, if he had not been distracted by a second object in the chamber. He thrust the strip of metal into the pocket of his coat.

Elvin's second find was a small,

transparent cylinder, filled with tiny, multi-colored spheres, exactly like a jar of hard candy. There was nothing else in the rocket, except for the motor built into the tailpiece. The blue glow of the rocket began to fade.

Vaguely Elvin became aware that something was amiss. He began to suspect that he had stumbled upon something more than a stray rocket from Muroc. He wanted to tell somebody about it. Clutching the cylinder of colored balls he ran back to the house.

The party had reached one of its numerous climaxes. The hall was jammed with chattering high school students. They swirled in a flood around Mrs. Schermerhorn, who seemed to be enjoying herself as much as they were.

Gary Elvin grabbed her arm. "I've found a rocket!" he cried.

"Rocket?" she frowned for a moment, and then smiled brightly. "Oh, the racket. Yes, but they do have so much energy, don't they?"

He held up the cylinder. "This was in it!"

"Oh, you found it, Mr. Elvin. We looked high and low; now we—"

"It was in the rocket."

"... now we can have our contest."

Desperately a new idea occurred to him. "Can you get these kids quiet? I want to 'phone."

"But it's so early, Mr. Elvin. We can't expect them to go home yet."

"No, Mrs. Schermerhorn. 'Phone.

I want to telephone!"

"Oh. Yes; of course. We'll have our contest in the living room."

Gary Elvin wormed his way toward the closet under the stairway. It was a very small telephone alcove, not designed for utility. Yet he found he could shut out some of the din if he jackknifed himself against the slanting wall and held the door partly shut.

But it required the use of both his hands. He set the cylinder on a bookcase in the hall and squeezed into the closet. With the telephone in his hand, he hesitated. It had seemed a good idea a moment ago—to call in the Authorities. But, to bring the generalization down to specifics, just who would that be?

In a big city he would have telephoned the police. But San Benedicto was a California valley town, small, sleepy, and contented. The four-man police force was more or less capable of handling minor traffic violations, but certainly nothing else. The State Police? Elvin doubted they would have jurisdiction. His last, feeble resort seemed to be the *San Benedicto News*, a daily, four-page advertising circular that passed, locally, for a newspaper. Elvin called the editor-reporter at his home.

After he had told his story, Elvin had to suffer a certain standardized banter concerning the advisability of changing his brand of bourbon. It was entirely meaningless, a form of humor enjoyed by the valley

people. Matt Henderson eventually agreed that the strange rocket might bear investigation.

"I'll be out first thing in the morning," he promised.

"In the morning! Listen, Matt, this thing may be — it might—" He was unable to crystalize his reasons for urgency. He finished lamely, "It's important, I think."

"It ain't going to run away, is it?"

"No, but—"

"Then we can both get a good night's sleep."

Gary Elvin turned away from the telephone, vaguely dissatisfied. He felt that something ought to be done immediately. What, he didn't know, or why. He went to get his cylinder of colored spheres from the bookcase where he had left it. The jar was gone.

He heard a burst of talk in the living room and he was suddenly frightened. From the archway he looked in on the guests, some thirty youngsters, all of the tenth grade of San Benedicto High School. They sprawled over chairs and couches, or they sat, Indian fashion, on the floor. Mrs. Schermerhorn stood in the center of the room, like a judge, smiling patiently. All thirty of the guests were chewing industriously. On the floor stood Elvin's jar of colored spheres, open and more than half-empty.

"Oh, dear," Mrs. Schermerhorn protested, turning to Elvin. "Something seems wrong with their gum."

They've tried and tried, but I haven't seen a single bubble. And it did seem such a clever game! I suppose if the gum were stale—" Her voice trailed off when she saw the horror on Elvin's face.

Wordlessly he pointed at the open jar. The room fell silent. All thirty of the youngsters looked at him. Their chomping jaws became motionless.

"Is — is that mine?" he whispered hoarsely.

"The jar you brought in?" Mrs. Schermerhorn asked. "I don't know, Mr. Elvin, I'm sure. Mabel Travis was supposed to bring the gum for the contest, and she forgot where—"

"But mine wasn't gum." He licked his lips, uncomfortable in the focus of so many staring eyes. "A — a rocket of some sort fell in the field, just beyond the irrigation ditch. I found the cylinder inside. It might be — it could be — anything."

Elvin had the strange sensation, for almost ten seconds, of looking at a motion picture film that had stopped at a single frame. Then, as if the projector had started to run again, all thirty of the youngsters broke into activity. For another second the analogy of the film persisted; Elvin had the elusive impression that each of the youngsters was carefully playing a part.

They clamored to go out and see the rocket. Mrs. Schermerhorn protested that they would ruin their clothes trailing over the fields after

dark. The guests allowed themselves to be talked into putting off their curiosity until morning. As their excited talk faded, Mabel Travis looked up at Elvin.

"Was your jar the one on the bookcase, Mr. Elvin?" she asked, eyeing him with her enormous, blue eyes.

"Yes. Is that where you got—"

"No." The room was still again, and all the youngsters were looking at her with a peculiar anxiety. "I thought that was one of the prizes. You know, when we played forfeits earlier in the—"

"Of course," Mrs. Schermerhorn put in. "Bill Blake did win a jar of candy, didn't he?"

"And that's what I thought the jar was when I saw it on the bookcase," Mary Travis continued. "So I took it upstairs and put it with our coats in the bedroom. I'll get it for you, Mr. Elvin." Slowly she picked up the nearly empty jar on the floor and recapped it. "I'm going to take this back to the drugstore tomorrow morning and demand my money back. I certainly don't like being cheated!"

When she returned to the living room, she handed Elvin his cylinder of colored balls and slowly his fear dissipated. Until a competent authority analyzed the contents, the jar represented unknown danger. It might be harmless; but it could also be an explosive, a form of fuel for the rocket, perhaps even germ colonies used in biological warfare. If

Bill Blake had taken it home with him as an innocent jar of candy—Elvin shuddered.

The party broke up and Elvin went to his room. He hung his suit carefully at the back of his closet to preserve the creases and thereby cut down on his cleaning bill. After five years of living on a teacher's salary, such economies had become second nature with him. He brought out his blue serge and hung it on the door; it was the suit he would wear next week to school.

Saturday dawned crisply sunny. Elvin shaved and dressed leisurely. Through the dormer windows of his room he saw the rich, black fields that surrounded the ranch house and the distant ridge of misty mountains beyond the desert, one or two of them crested with snow.

The Schermerhorns, of course, were already awake and busy. Elvin heard the clatter of dishes in the kitchen. He saw the twins, David and Donald, tall and muscular in their tight jeans and brilliant plaid shirts, working in their shop back of the garage. Pop Schermerhorn was in conference with a score of day laborers clustered around the half-dozen tractors in the drive. Through the open garage door Elvin could see the Schermerhorn Cadillac, the station wagon, and the red Convertible that belonged to the twins.

The scene could be duplicated, with minor variations, on any day of the week. Elvin always resented

the Schermerhorn prosperity, even though Pop Schermerhorn had been kind enough to offer him board and room when it was obvious the family did not need the additional income.

Elvin never allowed himself to forget that the Schermerhorns owned one of the largest ranches in the valley as well as the feed store in San Benedicto and a half-interest in the bank. Yet Pop Schermerhorn actually boasted that he had never gone past the eighth grade in school, and his kids were fortunate to be considered mentally normal. Elvin had the twins in class; he knew the limits of their ability. Donald had an I.Q. of 89, David of 85.

Yet such a family literally rolled in money, while Elvin was like a slum-dweller staring emptily into a crowded shop window.

Matt Henderson turned in from the main highway as Elvin finished breakfast. He joined the reporter and they walked out to the field beyond the irrigation ditch. In daylight the terrain was very different. Elvin backtracked over the same ground several times before it dawned on him that he could not locate the rocket.

Perspiration beaded his face. That was impossible! The rocket was large enough to be seen from any point in the field. Even if some part of the mechanism had caused it to rise again during the night, Elvin would have found the gapping hole the point of the projectile had torn

in the earth. But there was nothing. Not a furrow in the ploughed field was disturbed.

Visibly amused; Matt Henderson departed, repeating his formula about brands of liquor. This time, Elvin thought, the reporter actually believed it. Elvin walked back to the ranch. He was very angry; but, more than that, he was coldly afraid—and he had no idea what he was afraid of.

The Schermerhorn twins stopped him as he crossed the driveway.

"You sure made us bite on that one, Mr. Elvin," Donald said good naturedly.

"Yeah," David added. "All the kids came over early this morning to see your rocket."

"I guess we deserve it, though," Donald went on philosophically, "for pulling that deal on you in class last week."

Gary Elvin went up to his room in a daze and sat staring at the bottle of colored spheres. It seemed entirely clear what had happened last night; yet, conceivably, the rocket could have been an hallucination. If so, it was because of the grinding frustrations of his job. But Elvin had a good mind; he did not have to let a bunch of discourteous rattle-brained kids get him down. David and Donald had given him the clue: the rocket was simply a practical joke he had played on his class of tenth graders.

The second step in driving out the

"dream" was an appeal to authority. He must understand the limits of scientific possibility in the use of rockets. That meant a trip to the library. Although it was four miles to San Benedicto, Elvin decided to walk; the exercise would help clear his head.

He entered the library at eleven-thirty, half an hour before the building was closed for the weekend. It was a good library. The assessment rate in prosperous San Benedicto was high, and books had been purchased wisely. In the card catalogue Elvin found listed a number of up-to-date references that he could use; but there was nothing on the shelves. Five minutes before closing time, he asked the librarian for help.

"I don't suppose there's anything in," she answered. "We've had a perfect run on books all morning."

"You mean everything in the library is out?"

"Everything worthwhile." She beamed. "And most of the borrowers were your tenth graders, too, Mr. Elvin. You've certainly done a wonderful job of inspiring that class to do serious reading. Why, do you know Mabel Travis has been in here three times today? She took out seven books as soon as the library opened, and she had them back by nine-thirty. Said she'd read them all, too."

"Seven books in less than two hours?" Elvin laughed.

"I suppose she thought she had. Poor little Mabel! She hasn't much

to work with, you know. But it was her new attitude I liked — so intense, so serious. And she was doing such heavy reading, too.”

Elvin walked back to the Schermerhorn ranch, enjoying the noon-day warmth. San Benedicto was crowded with Saturday shoppers. He met his students everywhere, and always they commented on the practical joke he had played on them. By the time he was back in his room, the fiction of the joke was thoroughly established in his own mind. He almost believed it himself.

He glanced again at the transparent cylinder of spheres. A chemist might be able to analyze the contents and say where the jar had originated. Perhaps Miss Gerkin could do it. She had taught science for more than twenty years at San Benedicto High. Yet Elvin knew he couldn't ask her for help. If the colored balls turned out to be nothing more than hard candy, then by inescapable logic he would have to accept the fact that he was suffering from a major hallucination. It was more comfortable not to know the truth.

The idea of candy, however, brought up another association. Mrs. Schermerhorn had said that earlier in the evening Bill Blake had won a jar of candy as a prize. Bill Blake was the prize joker of the tenth grade. Elvin had what seemed to be an intuitive flash of understanding. The rocket had been a joke, all right, but it had been aimed at

Elvin. The kids had rigged it up before he came home from the show. During the night they had come back and taken the stage setting away.

Elvin spent the rest of the weekend planning his revenge. He didn't think of it as that, but rather disciplinary action. Yet he knew the class would get the point and possibly even heed the implied warning. In five years Elvin had reduced the complex process of teaching to one workable rule: break the class, or the kids will break you.

Now he chose the classical cat-whip of a surprise test to crack them back into line. He spent Sunday planning it and duplicating the pages. He was scrupulously careful to be fair — at least as he defined the term. The examination covered nothing that had not been discussed in class. But Elvin taught grammar, and no field of the abstract allows such devious application of the flimsy nonsense passing for rules.

On Monday morning, with a thin smile, Elvin was ready for them. He had tenth grade English first period. As he passed out the mimeographed pages, he waited for waves of groaning to sweep the room. Nothing happened. He felt an annoying pang of anger. A hand shot up.

“Yes, Charles?” he snapped.

“If we finish before the end of the period, can we have free reading?”

“I doubt you'll finish, Charles. This test is ten pages long.”

"But if we do —"

"By all means, yes."

Gary Elvin leaned back in his chair and surveyed, with satisfaction, the thirty heads bent studiously over their desks. For perhaps five minutes the idyll lasted, until Donald Schermerhorn brought his test up to the desk and asked permission to go to the library. Elvin was both amazed and disappointed; but at once he reassured himself. The test had been simply too hard for Donald.

Nonetheless, as soon as Donald was out of the room, Elvin checked his examination against the key. As he turned through the pages, his fingers began to tremble. Donald had answered everything — and answered it correctly. Before Elvin had finished checking Donald's test, ten more students had left theirs on the desk and headed for the school library.

Within ten minutes Elvin was fighting a disorganizing bewilderment far worse than the rocket-hallucination. Every examination was completed, and none that he checked had as much as one mistake. Elvin wished he could believe that wholesale cheating had taken place, but he knew that was impossible because of the precautions he always took.

All of the tenth graders were back from the library by that time. They had each brought two or more books. Elvin's body went rigid with anger when he saw what was cur-

rently passing among them for the skill of reading. They were methodically turning pages almost as quickly as they could move their hands from one side of the books to the other, all with the appearance of engrossed attention.

Elvin banged a ruler on his desk. One or two faces looked up. "This has gone far enough!" he cried. "You asked for the privilege of free reading, but I do not intend you to make a farce of it." A hand went up. "Yes, Marilyn?"

"But we are reading, Mr. Elvin. Honestly."

"Oh, I see." His voice was thickly sarcastic. "And what's the title of your book?"

"Toynbee's *Study of History*."

"You've given up Grace Livingston Hill? Could you summarize Toynbee for us, Marilyn?"

"In another ten minutes, Mr. Elvin. I still have sixty pages to read."

Elvin turned savagely to another girl. "Mabel Travis! What are you reading?"

The buxom girl looked up languidly. For a split second her big eyes seemed focused on a distant prospective. "Why — why this, Mr. Elvin." She held up her book so he could see the title.

"*Hypnotism in Theory and Practice*," he snorted. And Mabel's I/Q was 71! "You've outgrown the comics, Mabel?"

"In a sense, yes, Mr. Elvin."

Elvin was saved from further disorientation by the interruption of an

office messenger with a special bulletin announcing a second period assembly. By the time he had read it, his anger was under control. He let the reading go on and spent the rest of the period plodding through the examinations. There was not an error in any of the papers. From the prospective of the day's events, Elvin later realized that, however personally unnerving, his own particular crisis had been a minor one.

THE first full scale public disaster came during the assembly, when the entire student body—nearly one hundred and fifty youngsters—was gathered in the auditorium. The principal, as always, rose to lead them in the Alma Mater. He was a huge, hatchet-faced, white-haired man, the terror of evil-doer and faculty members alike. He had a tendency to give a solemn importance to trivial things and to overlook the great ones; and there was no mistaking the awed, almost religious fervor with which he sang the school song—which was, perhaps, only natural, since he had written it himself.

On that disastrous morning he suddenly burst into a dance as the student body barrelled into the first chorus. He snatched up the startled girls' counselor and improvised a little rumba. Slowly the students' voices fell silent as they watched. Under the sweating leadership of the music teacher, the school orchestra held the pace for another bar or two, until one of the players stood up

and rendered a discordant hot lick on his trumpet.

A trio of caretakers carried the struggling principal off the platform and shouting teachers herded the students on to their next classes. Thirty minutes later the word-of-mouth information was carefully spread through the school that the principal had been taken to the hospital for observation and he was doing nicely. But by that time his fate seemed unimportant, for the girls' tenth grade gym teacher was having hysterics on the front lawn, convinced that all her students had turned into fish; and the boys' glee club teacher had abruptly announced that the nation was being invaded by Martians. He, too, had been carried off to the hospital in haste.

The rest of the faculty was badly shaken. When they met at lunch, they unanimously wanted the school closed for the rest of the day. But the principal had been too small a man to delegate any of his authority; as long as he was hospitalized, the teachers could do nothing.

After the ominous activity of the morning, however, most of the afternoon passed in relative order. True, the counselor gave pick-up tests to three tenth graders whose earlier I.Q. scores had been so low the validity had been questioned; and this time the same three outdid an Einstein. And the tenth grade math teacher was almost driven to distraction by a classroom discussion of the algebraic symbology equating

matter and time — all of which was entirely over his head.

Nothing really happened until five minutes before the end of the school day, when Miss Gerkin knocked weakly on Gary Elvin's door. As soon as he saw her face, he gave his class free reading and joined her in the hall. Fearfully she showed him a yellow Bunsen burner, which glowed softly in the afternoon sunlight.

"Do you know what it is, Gary?"

"It's one of those gas burners you have on the lab tables in—"

"The metal, I mean."

"Looks like gold. Aren't these rather expensive for a high school classroom?"

She sagged against the wall, running her trembling fingers over her thin lips. "It's that tenth grade, Gary. I have them last period for general science. Bill Blake and the Schermerhorn twins got to fooling around with the electro-magnet. They rewired it somehow and added a few — well, frankly, I don't understand at all! But now when anything — metal, glass, granite — when anything is put in the magnetic field, it's changed to gold."

"Transmutation of atomic structure? You know it can't be done!"

"Yes, I know it. But I saw it happen." She began to laugh, but checked herself quickly.

"It's a trick. I know that bunch better than you do. It's time one of us had it out with them.

He strode along the hall toward the science room, Miss Gerkin following meekly behind him. "I'm sure you're right, Gary, because the rest of the class hardly showed any interest in what the boys were doing. I actually asked Marilyn if she didn't want her necklace turned to gold, and she said she was too busy to bother. Imagine that, from a high school kid!"

"Busy doing what?"

"Working out the application of the Law of Degravitation, she said."

"The Law of Degravitation? I never heard of it."

Miss Gerkin sniffed righteously. "Neither have I, and I've taught science all my life."

Gary Elvin flung open the door of the science room. It was one minute before the end of the period. For a moment he looked in on a peacefully ideal classroom. Every student was at his bench working industriously. Then, row by row, they began to float upward toward the ceiling, each of them holding a tiny coil of thin wires twisted intricately around two pieces of metal and an electronic tube. The breeze from the open window gathered them languidly into a kind of huddle above the door.

The bell rang as Miss Gerkin began to scream. Elvin fought to hold on to his own sanity as he tried to help her, but a degree of her hysteria transferred itself to him. His mind became a patchwork of yawning blank spaces interspersed with unco-

ordinated episodes of reality.

He remembered hearing the bell and the rush of the class out of the room. He remembered the piercing screams of Miss Gerkin's terror echoing through the suddenly crowded halls. Beyond one of his black gulfs of no-memory, he was in the nurse's office helping to hold Miss Gerkin on the lounge while the school doctor administered a sedative.

Slowly the integrated pattern of his thinking returned when he was driving back toward the Schermerhorn ranch. It was late in the afternoon; the sun was setting redly beyond the ridge of mountains. As Elvin's fear receded, he was able to think with a kind of hazy clarity. He had seen a metal Bunsen burner that had been turned into gold; he had seen the crusty principal of the school break into a rumba, and three of his colleagues driven to hysteria; he had seen a tenth grade class floating unsupported in the air. All of it manifestly absurd and impossible.

But it had happened. Elvin could visualize only two plausible explanations: mass insanity or mass hypnosis. Hypnosis! A sluggish relay clicked in his mind. He remembered a book. One of the tenth graders had been reading it — *Hypnotism in Theory and Practice*.

Everything seemed clear after that. The tenth grade was an obstreperous bunch of unsocial adolescents. Somehow they had stumbled upon hypnotism and learned how

to use it.

The time for an accounting had come. Because of where Elvin lived, he was admirably situated to break the Schermerhorn twins first; and they were, perhaps, the weakest members of the group. He would have them alone, without the support of their peers. It would be easy. After all, he was a mature adult; they were still children. Once he had a confession from them, it would only be a minor operation to clear up the whole mess.

When he reached the Schermerhorn ranch, dinner was on the table. He had no time to talk to the twins until afterward. Both David and Donald bolted the meal and rushed back to their workshop behind the garage. Their usual bad manners, Elvin realized, but what else could be expected?

Elvin finished a leisurely pipe in the living room, and then sauntered out to the boys' workshop. Surprisingly, the door was locked, the windows thickly curtained; they had never taken such precautions before. He knocked and, after a long wait, both David and Donald came outside to talk to him. They were naked to the waist and their husky, tanned bodies gleamed with sweat. A smudge of grease was smeared over David's unkempt blond hair.

"Working on your car, boys?" Elvin inquired indulgently. He knew the technique. Put them at their ease, first; then come to the point

when their guard was down.

"Well, not exactly, Mr. Elvin." Donald said.

"Mind if I watch? I always say I can learn as much about motors from you two as you learn from me about grammar."

Neither of the twins said anything. After an uncomfortable silence, Elvin cleared his throat pointedly. He had never met with such disrespect. If they were his kids, they would long ago have been taught proper courtesy for their superiors! To fill the lengthening void, he asked.

"What did you think of the little test I gave this morning?"

"It was all right," Donald said.

"You both did pretty well; I'm proud of you."

"We had everything right," David pointed out without a flicker of expression.

Elvin couldn't seem to engineer the dialogue as he used to. In that case, this was as appropriate a time as any for the question he had come to ask. He spoke slowly, with a tone of disinterest. "Do either of you know anything about hypnotism?" As a shocker, Elvin realized, it left much to be desired; their faces told him nothing.

"A little," David volunteered.

"We read eight or nine books on it over the weekend," Donald added.

"That's a lot of reading. It must have taken a great deal of time."

"Oh, a couple of hours."

Elvin clenched his fists in futile anger, but he kept his voice steady.

"Is anybody else in the tenth grade reading up on hypnotism?"

"I suppose so," Donald admitted. "I'm not sure. Why don't you ask in class tomorrow?"

"It occurs to me that a clever hypnotist could be responsible for what happened at school today."

"Some of it; isn't that rather obvious? We'd like to go on talking, Mr. Elvin, honest. But we have a lot of work to finish. It'll be bedtime soon enough."

"But you know about hypnotism, don't you?"

"We know how it's done, yes, and its limitations so far as genuine telepathy—"

"Who created that ridiculous scene in the auditorium?" Elvin's voice rose as he tried to put on pressure.

"I wouldn't worry about the principal, Mr. Elvin, if I were you. He's always been a neurotic."

"Mighty big words you're using these days, Donald. Where'd you hear them?"

"The principal is a little man—mentally, I mean. He's afraid of people because he isn't sure of himself. So he makes himself a tin god, a dictator, just to show the rest of us—"

"I want to know where you picked all this up!"

Patiently the twins began to talk, taking turns at delivering an improvised lecture in psychology, shot through with an array of highly technical terms. As Elvin listened to their

monotonous voices, he slowly felt very tired. His head began to ache as his anger ebbed. More than anything else, he wanted a long night's sleep. Yawning wearily, he thanked the boys — for what, he wasn't quite sure — and went up to his room.

Some time before dawn Elvin awoke for a moment. He thought he heard the sound of a motor in the driveway, but he was too sleepy to get up to see what it was. Two hours later he awoke to chaos.

Mrs. Schermerhorn was shaking his shoulder. He looked up into her white, terrified face. Her hand trembled as she clutched her quilted robe close to her throat.

"Mr. Elvin, they'll need your help. Mr. Schermerhorn's waiting for you."

He shook sleep out of his mind sluggishly. "Why? What's happened?"

"The bank's gone. Just — just gone!"

He blinked and shook his head again. "I — I don't think I heard you right, Mrs. Schermerhorn."

"There's a jungle where the bank used to be. With tigers in it." She laughed wildly for a moment, but the laughter dissolved into tears and she reached for the bottle of smelling salts in the pocket of her robe. "Most of them have been shot by this time, I think. The tigers. Think of it, Mr. Elvin — tigers in San Benedicto!" She began to laugh again.

When Elvin joined Pop Schermer-

horn and the twins in the station wagon, Mrs. Schermerhorn followed him out of the house with a thermos of hot coffee. As she put it in the car, she saw the rifles they were taking with them. She began to weep again, clinging desperately to the side of the car. Suddenly the twins knelt beside her, and threw their arms around her neck.

"We're sorry, Mom," David whispered. "Terribly sorry."

"You've nothing to be sorry about," she replied. "It's not your fault."

"Better get back inside," Pop Schermerhorn told her. "Mind, keep the doors locked. Things ain't safe no more around here."

As they drove into San Benedicto, Elvin was considerably puzzled by the attitude of the twins. Normally talkative to the point of nausea, they were now strangely quiet. And this was exactly the sort of thing that should have inspired their most adolescent repartee.

The sun was rising as they stopped the station wagon among the clutter of cars filling Main Street. Elvin stared in disbelief at the neat square of tropical jungle rising cleanly in the heart of San Benedicto. Not only the bank but a whole block of business houses was gone. This could be written off neither as insanity nor hypnotism; it was a madness existing in actual fact. Elvin gave up trying to discover any logic in what was happening. Both reason and natural law seemed to have abdicat-

ed.

The periphery of jungle was surrounded by armed men. At intervals they shot at shadows lurking among the trees and, as the sun brightened, the accuracy of their aim increased. They were not worrying about causes, either; they were responding with excellent self-discipline to the emergency of tigers roaming the streets of San Benedicto. Afterwards, at their leisure, they could speculate on how the jungle had come to be there.

There was only one fatality. A tiger sprang out of the jungle and mauled a man who had pressed too close. It happened directly in front of the Schermérhorn twins. They turned their rifles on the tiger and killed it instantly; but the man was dead, too.

Elvin was surprised to see tears in the eyes of the twins, but he credited it to the unstable emotions of adolescence. Both of them had acted with maturity when they faced the tiger; no adult could have done more. Still they wept, even though the man was a stranger.

By eight o'clock the stirrings in the jungle had stopped. The men began to relax. Waitresses from the Bid-a-Wee Cafe brought out doughnuts and coffee and distributed them among the crowd.

There came, then, a new disturbance at the far end of Main Street, a shouting of tumultuous voices. A mob moved slowly into the center

of town, clinging to the sides of an antiquated dump truck.

"Gold! Gold! Gold!" It was like a chant shouted with ecstatic antiphony. The dump truck stopped and Elvin saw the unbelievable — gleaming heaps of gold shoveled like gravel into the back of the vehicle. The driver stood on the running board, weaving drunkenly.

"The whole damn' desert," he shouted. "All of it, as far as I could see — all pure gold!"

He took a shovel and scattered the nuggets and dust among the throng. "Take all you like. Lots more where this came from!"

The mob stirred slowly at first, and then more and more violently, as the men began to race for their cars. The vehicles were already crowded close together. Gears ground and fenders crumbled. The street became helplessly jammed with locked cars. Only a few on the fringe escaped. Angry arguments broke out, degenerating into fist fights. The peak violence cooled a little after a few heads had been smashed, and grudgingly the men turned to the task of freeing their cars.

Donald snatched Elvin's arm. "Stay here with Pop," he shouted above the clatter. "Dave and I are going back to the ranch. Mom may need us. The desert runs right up to the edge of our property, you know."

"Going to walk?"

"I think we can get the station wagon out. It's pretty far back."

Elvin and Pop Schermerhorn worked side by side helping untangle the mass of vehicles. After an hour order had been more or less restored, and the mob had thinned, since each of the freed cars had been driven off at top speed to the desert bonanza.

For a moment the sky darkened. Elvin looked up. The jungle had disappeared and a medieval castle, complete with knights, had taken its place. The mob shrank back in terror. So did the knights, although one or two on the battlements ventured to send shafts into this new enemy that had appeared at the castle gates. But there was no time for real hostilities to develop, for the castle vanished and a 19th century factory took its place. The factory survived less than thirty seconds, before it gave way to the bank and row of stores which had originally stood on the site.

For some reason the crowd began to cheer, as they would a victorious football team. But the tumult died quickly, for the buildings were covered with a slime of jungle vines, torn up by their roots, and a pair of snarling lions stood at bay on the sidewalk. After they had shot the lions, they found a cobra was coiled on the cashier's desk in the bank and an antelope was imprisoned in the dry goods store. They were still clearing out miscellaneous wild life when reporters from the city newspapers, apprised by the *San Benedicto News* of the gold

strike, descended upon the town. They were followed by a deluge of prospectors, arriving in anything that would move — bicycles and Cadillacs, Model T's and Greyhound buses.

The mob poured into town first by the scores, and then by the thousands. Primarily male, their prevailing mood was explosive instability, a glassy-eyed greed flamed higher as each truckload of gold poured back into town from the diggings. The four-man police force was helpless. The major telegraphed to Sacramento for the National Guard; in the interim, he deputized every townsman he could find, among them Elvin and Pop Schermerhorn.

ELVIN worked until he was exhausted, herding the mob into the streets and through the town as rapidly as they would move; and still there was no relief, and the number in the throng increased by the minute. Newsreel trucks; television units, press cars twisted among the vehicles heading for the desert. Regularly, heavy duty trucks brought tons of gold back from the diggings and deposited them at the bank until the aisles overflowed and the precious metal sifted through the windows forming little pyramids in the street. By noon Treasury men flew in from Washington. They circled the diggings and landed to inspect the quality of the gold hoard at the bank.

Fifteen minutes later a rumor filt-

ered among the deputies: the Treasury men estimated that the San Benedicto strike would yield upwards of two or three hundred thousand times the known gold supply of the world. When the *San Benedicto News* came out in mid-afternoon, it headlined the first shock of the economic disaster:

World currencies were collapsing; three nations were already bankrupt; international trade was grinding to a standstill, with no medium of exchange; retail prices in the United States had started to skyrocket, in the wake of rising stock market quotations. And still the procession of dump trucks brought the tons of gold back from the desert. When the bank overflowed the dry goods store was commandeered as an emergency depository, and later the Five-and-Ten and the sprawling basement of Montgomery Ward's.

When the first contingent of National Guardsmen marched into San Benedicto, it was obviously too small to police the mob. The press estimated that a quarter of a million people were moving into the valley every hour. More Guard units were summoned and ultimately, at the Governor's request, two regiments of the regular army were dispatched to San Benedicto, along with a Tank Corps and ten thousand Marines from Camp Pendleton.

It was nightfall before the deputies were relieved. Tired and dirty, Elvin and Pop Schermerhorn rode back to the ranch on a prospector's truck. From the lawn they looked

across Schermerhorn's ploughed fields at the desert, teeming with mobs of men and bright in the glare of countless searchlights. Mrs. Schermerhorn met them on the porch. She clung to her husband's arms, trembling.

"I'm so glad you're back safely!" she whispered. "They've been moving closer all day." She nodded toward the desert. "Like ants, trampling and destroying everything that gets in their way."

Pop Schermerhorn clenched his fists. "If they'd broken in here, I'd have—"

"If it hadn't been for the twins, I don't know what might have happened. They got their class over here, the whole tenth grade. All day long they've been patrolling our fences, without even stopping long enough to eat. They're all out in the workshop now; they've made it a kind of headquarters."

THE three of them went into the living room. Pop Schermerhorn and Elvin dropped wearily on a couch, while Mrs. Schermerhorn poured stiff drinks for both of them. The radio was playing, a smoothly sweet dance orchestra from San Francisco. But the music faded abruptly, and an excited newscaster interrupted.

"It's been like this all day," Mrs. Schermerhorn said. She looked up nervously as the side door opened and the twins came in.

"We just wanted some more cop-

per wire, Mom, for the thing we're making," Donald said, but he hesitated when he heard the news broadcast. Both twins dropped silently on the arms of an overstuffed chair and listened.

The bulletin was brief; it reviewed the growing chaos among the foreign exchanges, the expanding list of bankruptcies. Two European nations, driven to internal disaster, had gone to war; already the big powers were choosing sides, framing ultimatums. War seemed to be the one universal panacea for all things. In New York stores had started to quote new dollar prices every hour, although purchases made in silver were still relatively stable at the old value. The grating voice concluded, "The first estimates of today's yield from the San Benedicto field place it in the neighborhood of seventy-thousand tons; mining experts predict that tomorrow the figure may be tripled." As the music came on again, Donald got up and snapped off the radio.

"The economy of the world's being wrecked, isn't it?" he asked. "By too much gold."

"I don't understand," Pop Schermerhorn answered, shaking his head. "Gold's valuable; we need it; it makes us rich. But now, when we have all we want—"

"The trouble is, it has no use," David said. "Governments buy it and bury it. If gold becomes as plentiful as iron ore, we still can't do much with it. You can't make skyscrapers or sewer pipes out of gold;

it's too soft."

"The government ought to clear out the field and stop the mining," Donald suggested. "That might help."

"Not as long as the world knows the gold is still here," Elvin answered. He studied the twins carefully; their comment on the economy seemed mature for tenth graders. Suddenly Elvin's weary mind began to pece together a vague kind of understanding, when he remembered the transformation of the Bunsen burner to gold. Beyond his shadowy comprehension loomed the vista of a grandiose dream of how he could use the situation for his own profit. It was intoxicating, like reaching out for the stars and finding them within his grasp.

"It's all crazy!" David cried. "We don't really use gold, anyway, in our economy. Why can't we just forget it, and go on using dollars the way we used to?"

"Because people are fools," Elvin said.

"Or, perhaps, just children," David replied. He stood up, stretching, so that his muscles rippled beneath his plaid shirt. "Well, we better get that wire, Don, and go back to work."

AFTER the twins had left, Elvin went up to his room to bathe. His mind skipped pleasantly over the delightful and limitless possibilities of his new understanding. The whole thing, of course, hinged on his

approach. But, after all, that shouldn't be hard; they were still children emotionally. Five years of teaching had demonstrated, to his satisfaction, that he could handle any adolescent.

He began to dress. The clothes he had worn that day were streaked and torn. He took his second suit out of the closet. As he hung the coat over the back of his desk chair, he heard metal strike against the wood. It was the coat he had worn on Friday night, when he found the rocket; in the pocket was the strip of metal that had been sealed over the cylinder of colored spheres.

He held it in his hand again. It was the first time the full surface of the metal had touched his skin. As he had before, he felt the sensation of jumbled words flooding his mind, but now the feeling was more intense. He could not put the metal down. Instead he dropped into his desk chair and his eyes were drawn irresistibly to the pattern of tiny, translucent globes that dotted the surface of the metal. The heat of his body produced a chemical reaction; one by one the little globes exploded.

Pictures filled Elvin's mind, of cities, machines, towering stacks of books. These dissolved, and he saw planets whirling on the black emptiness of space around the glowing disk of a red sun. There was a cataclysmic splatter of light as the sun exploded, and slashing flame shot out to destroy its circling planets. That picture, too, disappeared and

he was staring at a gray nothingness while an emotional voice spoke to him deep within his brain.

"To the intelligent life form, on the Third Planet, System K; Greetings from the dying world of Dyran. You have located our rocket from the hypnotichord built into the fins, and, by opening it, you have demonstrated a condition of rationality that we are able to help. We speak to you now through hypnotic pictures which you are translating into the symbology of your own society. Our astronomers predict that our planetary system will shortly be destroyed, because our sun is dying. It is useless for us to try to escape, for no world that we can find within the limits of our telescope has the particular combination of atmospheric gases which we need in order to live. The only sky-body that we have ever studied that gives any indication of higher life forms is yours. To you, then, we send the substance of our knowledge, the laws and principles that we have developed over a period of two million years since our recorded history began. We could have sent our machines, our libraries of records, yet the chance that you would not comprehend them alone is too great. Instead we send our learning capsules, which we use in the instruction of our young. Break the container which is sealed into this rocket and consume one of the colored spheres. It is, basically, a stimulant to the cerebral cortex of any reasoning animal which al-

ready has a memory of the past and a concept of the future. Long ago we discovered that, unaided, the mind will function with only a small portion of its specialized cells. This stimulant forces conscious activity upon all parts of the cortex; in the process of stimulation, your brain will receive the full knowledge of basic principles which we ourselves have developed. We send you fifty of these only, but it will be enough. You have not, on your planet, the material with which to make additional capsules for your people, but you will not need them. The fifty who learn from these will become teachers for the rest. Carry on for us the culture that we have made on the dying world of Dyran."

THE gray mist faded and Elvin stood up. He felt refreshed, alert; his mind bubbled again with schemes. He looked at the bottle of colored spheres still standing on his desk, and he knew they were no more than bubble gum or candy. On Friday night, while he telephoned, the tenth graders at the Schermerhorn party had started their bubble gum contest, but instead of gum they had by accident absorbed the accumulated knowledge of Dyran, a culture more than three hundred times as old as the earth's!

It was overwhelmingly clear what had happened after that. Thirty adolescents; suddenly possessing more knowledge than the world had ever known, had run riot, playing with

hypnotism, the transmutation of matter, the Law of Degravitation, the fourth dimensional transposition of whole city blocks. Within two days their energetic curiosity, their adolescent love of excitement and experiment, had thrown the world into crisis. By this time, Elvin concluded, they would be terrified by a feeling of immense guilt, ready to be told what to do to make amends.

It was up to him to be the one who did the telling. If, at the same time, he could get his hands on one of the learning capsules—the prospect was so dazzling it left him breathless.

He slipped out to the boys' workshop back of the garage. When he knocked on the door, Donald opened it two inches and quickly tried to close it again. But Elvin thrust his hand over the latch.

"No, Donald," he said sternly. "This time you don't get away with it. You see, I know what happened when you ate the spheres."

The door creaked open. Elvin walked into the workshop, where all thirty of the tenth graders were gathered around the littered work table. The rocket was there, and they were studying the tiny motor. In a corner was a hastily constructed forge; three girls were working with it, turning out curved strips of metal, which a boy was machining on the metal lathe. In the center of the shop was a tall, gleaming bar of metal, surrounded by a network of wires and fastened to a wooden base

made from an orange crate.

"You're cooking up some more surprises for us?" Elvin asked.

"No," Donald replied solemnly. "We're ashamed of—"

"As, indeed, you should be."

"We're doing our best to put everything back the way it was," Mabel Travis said. "Honestly, Mr. Elvin."

"It won't help much; the damage is already done."

"But it can be undone. We've already fixed up part of it."

"Yes," David Schermerhorn cut in anxiously. "When Don and I came back this morning, the first thing we did was bring back the bank. Our machine's kind of crude, Mr. Elvin, so we couldn't get it right at first. I guess we picked up a castle or something in between; but that's all right, now. And the gold—well, we're going to turn it back to gravel again tonight." He gestured toward the bar of metal.

"We can work from the edge of our field," David pointed out. "The whole desert will change at once; the way it did last night."

"And what will you do with all the people on it?"

"It won't hurt them."

"But when they find their gold is gravel, you'll have a major catastrophe on your hands."

Marilyn bit her lip. "That's why we haven't done anything yet. We don't want anybody to get hurt but—"

"So you've considered that at last."

The more Elvin rubbed in the guilt, he reasoned, the more secure he would make himself.

"We could just transpose the whole area," Charles suggested. "We've considered that, too. Maybe in pieces, Mr. Elvin. You know, an acre or two to Australia, another to Germany, another to England. That couldn't cause much more than local riots."

"But the men would be mighty uncomfortable for a while."

"The only trouble is, our machines are so crude; we've had to build them out of scraps. And something could go wrong. We might try to send some of the mob to China, and end up putting them in the Pacific, or maybe back in time."

"You've done enough tampering," Elvin declared. "I won't help you at all, unless you promise to leave everything as it is. You have to put yourselves in a position to help the world, not destroy it."

ELVIN had injected just the right tone of nobility into his voice. The thirty adolescents consulted together in whispers. Then David asked,

"What do you want us to do, Mr. Elvin?"

"Let me act as your representative. I'll go to Washington and talk to responsible men in the government; I'll try to see the president himself. We should set up a scientific foundation for you, where you'll have the equipment you need and

where your experiments won't do the rest of us any harm. But, if I'm to convince anybody, I'm going to have to do some tall talking. If you had one of the capsules left—"

"No, Mr. Elvin; they're all gone." David was not looking at him, and Elvin knew he was lying; but this was not the occasion to make an issue of it. Above everything else, he had to see to it that they had complete faith in his motives.

"Then one of your machines," he suggested. "I have to make them understand I'm not a crank."

"That sounds sensible. Which one, Mr. Elvin? The Degravitational Unit is the smallest, and it would do the least harm if—" David looked away again. "—if it got out of your hands."

"It isn't sensational enough. I rather wanted to show them this thing you used to transpose the bank and a square of jungle."

"Oh, no!" Marilyn broke in. "We couldn't—"

"Why that, Mr. Elvin?"

"I've already told you. It's the sort of thing that would attract the attention of the important officials immediately, because it could be converted so readily to a weapon of inestimable value."

There was a long silence, while the thirty youngsters looked from one to the other. It lengthened. Elvin felt a creeping edge of fear. David spoke at last,

"I think you're right, Mr. Elvin.

We could show the world how to build a society adjusted to the needs of man; we could develop techniques for wiping out disease and mental disorders; we could show you how to conserve our resources, how to build material things for the mutual happiness of all people; how to create instead of destroying. But of course you're right. The only thing that would really interest any of us would be a new weapon, wouldn't it? All right; we'll give it to you."

Marilyn sprang up. "But, David—"

"I know what I'm doing!" he snapped at her in a tense whisper. Turning back to Elvin, he added smoothly, "But we'll want something from you first, Mr. Elvin."

"Anything, my boy; anything to promote the welfare of mankind. But no more of your tricks, mind."

"This is far from a trick, Mr. Elvin."

"So long as that's understood—"

"We're working on a machine—a new one. We have everything we need except tungsten. They use that in building television sets, among other things. I want you to drive down to one of the plants in Los Angeles and get us a pound of tungsten. They won't sell it to you; you'll have to steal it."

"Now, David! Only a thick-skulled schoolboy would take such an unsocial attitude! I'm a teacher, a responsible citizen, proud—"

"Do you want the machine for transposing matter?"

"Yes; for the good of the nation. But—"

"Then you'll have to take this risk. We'll give you a Degravitation-al Unit. That'll help you get away. When you bring us the tungsten, we'll deliver the transportation machine."

Elvin made the drive to Los Angeles in record time. The highway was jammed with traffic, but all of it was moving in the opposite direction, toward San Benedicto. He refused to think of the consequences if he were caught. The glittering dream was still blazing on the horizon of his mind. If they refused him the learning capsule, it was unfortunate, but there was nothing he could do about it. The important machine was the one that transposed matter through time. With that one device alone, Elvin could sway the world. Placed in the scales against such a reward, the moral issue of theft counted not at all.

LOS ANGELES whirled chaotically in the monetary crisis. The streets were jammed with people, buying everything they could before prices jumped again. In the confusion, Elvin had no difficulty breaking into a television plant. He didn't trip a burglar alarm until he was leaving the factory, but the Degravitational Unit made his escape easy. Within four hours he was back in San Benedicto. He hurried to the workshop. But when he pounded on the door, there was no response. He

tried the latch and the door swung open.

The room was empty, but on the table was a large envelope addressed to him. A thin thread of wire was fastened to it; as he picked it up, the wire broke and somewhere in the distance a motor began to hum.

"Dear Mr. Elvin," he read. "It was unkind of us to play another trick on you, but we're sure you'll be clever enough to steal the tungsten without getting caught. When you came to talk to us, we realized that the conclusion we had reached was right. Children — adolescent minds—have wrecked our world. You know all about that, Mr. Elvin; teachers always do. And you've told us so often in class about the unstable emotions of adolescents; their tantrums, their unpredictability, their unsocial behavior, their egocentricity and all the rest. We'd like to help, but there isn't much we can do, not really; you just want the machines we know how to make, not the ideas we've learned. We grew up, you see, on the day we turned the desert to gold. We found out what happens when you give children dangerous toys to play with.

"We made our mistake, and we know how to straighten it out. We've only waited for you to read this so that you would understand, at least for a moment. We have isolated ourselves in suspended time; we're right here in the workshop with you, but you can't see us, naturally, because we started standing still in time more

than an hour ago. When you opened your envelope, you tripped the motor of a matter transposition machine which will throw all time backward to last Friday night. None of this will have happened then. That should straighten everything out, don't you think?

"You'll find the rocket again, and you'll open it, just as you did before. But this time there'll be only a jar of bubble gum inside, because we've already consumed the learning capsules. There won't be any memory left for anyone — except ours. We've learned how to work with a planet of adolescents. We think we can help you mature in spite of yourselves; but this time no one will ever know how it is being done."

Elvin looked up, but before the anger and frustration could crystalize in his mind, the yellow lamp dimmed, the walls of the workshop faded and vanished. He fought for a moment against the blackness rising in his mind. The light paled and paled and finally it was nothing more than a red streak in the sky.

It moved closer and he saw that it was a falling object followed by a long plume of red flame. It flashed momentarily overhead and Elvin heard a dull thud as it fell in a field beyond the ranch house. He sprang up from the couch and moved off in the darkness. It had been a meteorite, of course; if it had survived the friction of the atmosphere, it would make an interesting exhibit for the science classroom . . .

THE END

☆ *The Moon — In Our Time!* ☆

PROFESSIONAL scientists can sometimes be more dogmatic than the laymen they often use as whipping posts. Consequently it is indeed a pleasure to catch one making a whopping profundity. Probably nowhere has this been more nicely done than in one of Willy Ley's numerous lectures on rocketry. Now as everyone knows, Willy Ley is no mean scientist himself but he has an inherent sympathy for the underdog and a firm belief in rocketry as the core of the future. It is particularly satisfying then, that he was able to catch so eminent an astronomer as Dr. Forest

Ray Moulton in a statement which he never should have made, and which undoubtedly has caused him much acute embarrassment since. The statement began:

"It must be stated that there is not the slightest possibility of such a journey. (i.e., interplanetary flight). . . ."

The statement goes on to say why. No fuel, no guidance, food supplies, oxygen, etc.

Every single item that the good astronomer lists has been taken care of. Astrogation, the general theory of rocket flight, food, water and air, landing, acceleration, meteoric inter-

ference and the host of other objections raised have been neatly leveled and the best of modern scientific minds assure us that today there is no reason why interplanetary flight cannot be made *starting now*, except that sufficient money isn't available to do the basic building and research!

No one knows how far the military have gone in their rocketry and in their plans for eventually establishing an artificial satellite around the Earth. That is still top secret. But unquestionably a good deal of energy and money has been expended in that direction. Groaning amateur rocket enthusiasts, sad science-fictionists, sorrowful believers who want to see interplanetary flight in their lifetime—all these may be

pleasantly surprised someday in the not remote future by the startling news that the first space flight is ready to be attempted.

The situation is reminiscent of television about ten or fifteen years ago. It was in the wind and "around the corner." People died waiting for it to happen—and then overnight it was here. Interplanetary rocket flight—and by that is meant either a satellite job or a trial unmanned Lunar flight—is also just around the corner. It's coming and soon—and when it happens rejoice and remember how even scientists of Moulton's stature will be wriggling and squirming in profound red-faced embarrassment. It doesn't pay to prophesy unless you're optimistic in these days of accelerating science!



Master Mind Of Fantasy



CULTS, coteries and addicts exist in a thousand fields. In literature, probably the most famous is that of the "Baker Street Irregulars" who preserve the memory of fiction's most famous detective, Sherlock Holmes in a startling number of ways ranging from monthly meetings to regular publications devoted to him and the stories of him.

It is no surprise then to realize that a similar group of addicts treasure the writings of Edgar Rice Burroughs whose prolificacy as well as quality, qualify him for a role similar to Conan Doyle's. No Fantasies can compare with the famous Tarzan and John Carter series either in reknown or inventives. The facile pen (typewriter and dictaphone too!) of Burroughs produced enough material to enable his admirers to read and thrash it over

endlessly.

An interesting branch of this "Burroughsiana" group is headed by Vernell Coriell who produces an interesting periodic journal devoted to reviews of the books, discussions of the characters and analyses of the films of Edgar Rice Burroughs. This labor of love is fascinating and absorbing and shows to what extent admirers of the genre will go.

Burroughs is dead but the immortal creations of his mind will people the world of fantasy lovers as long as fantasy is read—and that will be always! The highest compliment that can be paid to a story of today is to say "it reads like Burroughs" or "it reminds me of . . ." Dwight V. Swain, among others who have appeared in *Imagination*, follows closely in the footsteps of "The Master Mind of Fantasy."



EARTHSMITH

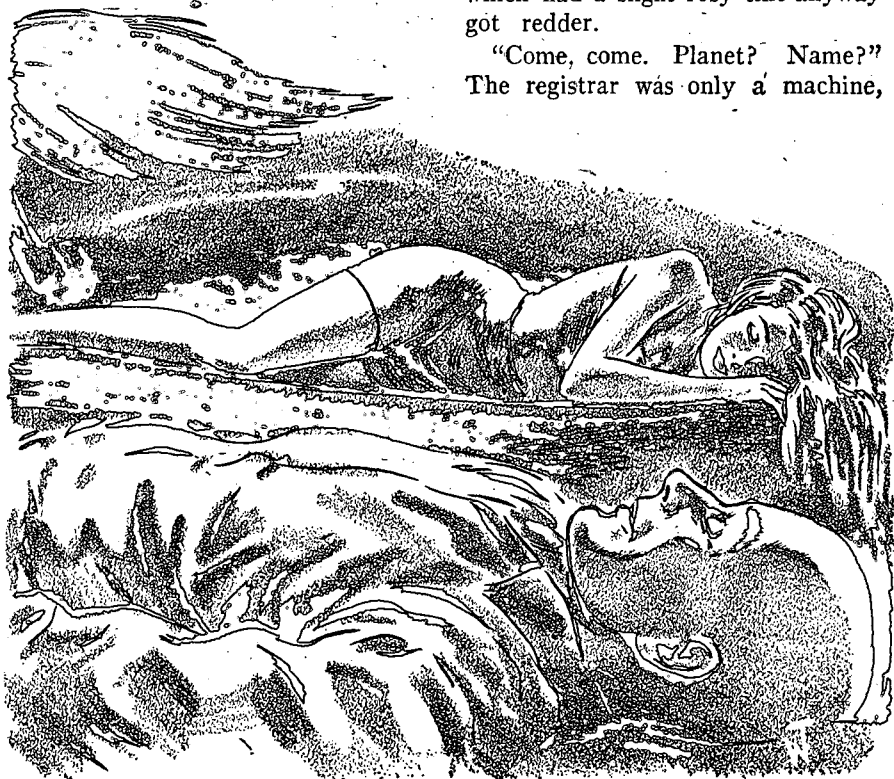
By Milton Lesser

Nobody at the Interstellar Space School had ever heard of Earth so naturally they treated Smith with contempt—or was it an innate fear? . . .

SOMEONE in the crowd tittered when the big ungainly creature reached the head of the line.
“Name?”

The creature swayed back and forth foolishly, supporting the bulk of his weight first on one extremity and then on the other. His face which had a slight rosy tint anyway got redder.

“Come, come. Planet? Name?”
The registrar was only a machine,



but the registrar could assume an air of feminine petulance. "We want to keep the line moving, so if you will please—"

The creature drew a deep breath and let the two words come out in a rush. "Earth, Smith," he said. Being nervous, he could not modulate his voice. Unable to modulate his voice, he heard the words come out too deep, too loud.

"Did you hear that voice?" demanded the man who had tittered. "On a cold wet night they say the karami of Caulo boom like that. And look at Earthsmith. Just look at him. I ask you, what can they accept at the school and still call it a school? Hey you, Earthsmith, what courses will you take?"

"I don't know," the creature confessed. "That's what I'm here for. I don't even know what they teach at the school."

"He doesn't know." More tittering.

The registrar took all this in impassively, said: "What planet, Earthsmith?"

The creature was still uncomfortable. "Earth. Only my name is not Earthsmith. Smith—"

The titterer broke into a loud guffaw. "Earthsmith doesn't even know what planet he's from. Good old Earthsmith." He was a small thin man, this titterer, with too-bright eyes, vaguely purple skin, and a well-greased shock of stiff green hair.

Smith squared his wide shoulders

and looked into the colored lights of the registrar. "It's a mistake. My name is Smith."

"What planet, Smith?"

"Earth. The planet Earth." Smith had a rosy, glistening bald head and a hairless face. A little bead of sweat rolled into his left eye and made him blink. He rubbed his eye.

"Age?" The machine had a way of asking questions suddenly, and Smith just stared.

"Tell me your age. Age. How old are you?"

Smith wanted to sit down, only there were no chairs. Just the room with its long line of people behind him, and the machine up front. The registrar.

"I'm twenty-seven."

"Twenty-seven what?"

"You asked me my age. I'm twenty-seven years old, and three months."

Except for the clicking of the machine, there was a silence. The voice of the machine, feminine again, seemed confused when it spoke. "I cannot correlate years, Smith of Earth. How old are you?"

It wasn't an ordeal, really, but Smith felt more uncomfortable every moment. Was the machine making fun of him? If it were, then it had an ally in the crowd, because the man who had tittered was laughing again, the green shock of hair on his head bobbing up and down.

"Earthsmith doesn't even know how old he is. Imagine."

THE machine, which was more feminine than not, asked Smith how far the planet Earth was from its primary, and what the orbital speed of the planet was. Smith told her, but again the terminology was not capable of correlation.

"Unclassified as to age, Smith. It's not important. I wonder, are you dominant or receptive?"

"I'm a man. Male. Dom—"

"That doesn't matter. Smith, tell me, how long has it been since anyone from the planet Earth has attended the school?"

Smith said he didn't know, but, to his knowledge, no one from Earth had ever been here. "We don't get around much any more. It's not that we can't. We just go and then we don't like it, so we come back to Earth."

"Well, from the looks of you I would say you are a receptive. Very definitely receptive, Smith." Given sufficient data, the registrar could not be wrong. Given sufficient data the registrar could tell you anything you wanted to know, provided the answer could be arrived at from the data itself. "The male and female distinction no longer holds, of course. On some planets the female is dominant, on some she's not. It's generally according to the time of colonization, Smith. When was Earth colonized?"

"It wasn't."

"What do you mean, it wasn't?"

"We were always there. We colonized the rest of the galaxy. Long

ago."

The registrar clicked furiously, expressed itself still more femininely this time. "Oh, *that* planet! You certainly are the first, Smith. The very first here, at the school. Room 4027, dominant companion." Neuter voice again. "That's all, Smith of Earth. Next."

The vaguely purple-skinned man stood before the registrar, winked at the flashing lights. "You know, now I can see what they mean when we're told of a missing link in the chain between man and animal. Old Earthsmith . . ."

"Name?" said the machine.

The man pointed at Smith, shook with silent laughter. The back of Smith's head, which could not properly be called bald because he had never had any hair on it, was very red.

"Name's Jorak."

"Planet?" demanded the fully neuter machine.

THERE was the red star, a monstrous blotch of crimson swollen and brooding on the horizon and filling a quarter of the sky. There was the fleck of white high up near the top of the red giant, its white-dwarf companion in transit. These were the high jagged crags, falling off suddenly to the sundered, frothy sea with its blood-red sun-track fading to pink and finally to gray far away on either side.

Smith watched the waves break far below him, and he almost stum-

bled when someone tapped his shoulder.

"That was mean of the man named Jorak." She might have been a woman of Earth, except that she was too thin, cast in a too-delicate mould. Yet beautiful.

Smith shrugged, felt the heat rise to his face and knew that he must have looked like a mirror for the red sun.

"Is that really a blush, Smith? Are you blushing?"

He nodded. "I can't help it. I—"

"Don't be foolish. I don't want you to stop. I think it looks nice."

Smith rubbed his pate, watched the hot wind blow the girl's yellow hair about her face. "They tell me my great great grandfather had a little fringe of hair around his head. I've seen pictures."

"How nice—"

"If you're trying to make fun of me, please go away. It wasn't nice, it was ugly. Either you have hair or you don't. The men of Earth used to have it, long ago. The women still do."

She changed the subject. "I'll bet you think this place is ugly, Smith."

Smith shook his head. "No, it's stark. If you like things that way, it isn't really ugly. But Earth is a planet of green rolling hills and soft rains and—you're making fun of me."

"You say that again and I'll take it as an insult." She smiled. "We

have our green rolling hills on Bortinot, only it's cold. I like it here because it's warm. And, of course, I have a lot to learn at school."

"Would you think I'm stupid if I ask you what?"

"No. And you were really serious in there when you said you didn't know what they teach."

"How could I know. I'm the first student here from Earth. Every five years—say, twenty times during the course of one lifetime—we get the application. This time the government finally decided someone should go. Mé."

"Well, they teach just about everything that could be of value in a transtellar culture."

"What?"

"Things like astrogration and ethics—"

"I caught the school express at a Denebian planet. Someone told me there that the school is decadent."

She smiled up at him. "Deneb is a slothful place, then. It is true that the school never stands still, changing its courses to meet the demands of a changing society. If Deneb cannot keep pace with the changes, that could explain the feeling. Right now, they'll be concentrating in dreams and dream-empathy, in some of the newer Garlonian dances, Sarchian cooking for the receptives and Wortan fighting for the dominants. Quite a virile program, Smith, provided one is up to it."

"What happened to your astrogration and ethics?"

"That? Oh, that's just a catch-all phrase. Your courses will depend on such things as your D or R classifications—"

"It makes me laugh a little," Smith admitted. "But they've classified me as a receptive. I guess they know what they're doing. Still—"

"You think you're strong, eh?"

"Well, I didn't see anyone in the registrar's room who would worry me very much in a fight."

"Society is sophisticated, Smith. There's more to strength than mere brawn. What sort of psi powers have they cultivated on the planet Earth?"

IN a general sense, but in a general sense only, Smith knew what she meant. "Well, there's hypnotism, and some people play at telepathy and clairvoyance. Nothing much, really."

"That isn't much, my friend."

"Why? What else is there?" Smith smiled for the first time. "I didn't know—" He shook his head, suddenly, to clear it. He felt tilted. He looked and he saw that everything was straight, but still he felt tilted. He tried to right himself, and down he went. On his stomach he lay, his legs twisted under him a little. Foolishly, he tried to get up. He couldn't.

"There's that." The girl laughed. "Suggestion without the need for hypnotism."

Smith stood up, said, "I see what

you mean."

"Think so?"

It began to rain. A brisk wind came up abruptly, and off in the distance Smith heard the roar of thunder. It came closer. Still closer. Like in a straight line. Smith watched the lightnings prance.

"We'd better get back to the school!" he cried. He didn't think she could hear his voice above the thunder. He started to shout again, but lightning crackled before his eyes. Between him and the girl. Something rumbled, and Smith started to fall. They had been blasted off the crag, and now they hurtled down through the sheets of hot rain . . .

"Feel yourself," the girl told him. The huge crimson sun still sat on the horizon. The air was hot and warm and Smith was dry.

"Suggestion," she smiled again. "Most of us have it to some degree, but we of Bortinot have it still more. Still think you should be a dominant?"

"Well—" The girl's face swam before his eyes. Lovely. Smith took a step forward, reached out and placed his big hands on her shoulders.

"Well what?" She was smiling.

"What's your name?"

"Geria."

His lips were big and hers were little, if full. He quivered as he kissed her. "I love you, Geria."

"I know it," she said.

“THE reason I went outside to watch the sea,” Smith said, “was because I didn’t know how to get to room 4027. I didn’t want to ask anyone, not after—”

“That makes sense. I’ll take you, Smith. I’m just down the hall from you, anyway.”

“Thank you, Geria.” Smith wondered how he knew her name was Geria. Nice name. “What happened after I thought there was a storm, Geria?” Smith suppressed a smile.

“Oh, nothing much. I just planted another suggestion in your mind. For now you’ve forgotten, but you will remember. Shall we go?”

They walked back down the path from the top of the crag, and soon Smith saw other students in groups of two and three. Ahead was the long low school, a dull rectangle of metal perhaps two miles long and half as wide. With Geria, Smith entered through one of the hundreds of doorways and followed her wordlessly up a mechanical staircase.

They flashed past many landings, and after a time Smith followed the girl across one of them and into a long hall.

“Simple,” she said. “You have the twenty-seventh room here on the fortieth floor. Mine is room eighteen. Will we be seeing more of each other, Smith?”

“As much as you’d like,” he said, but it made him feel foolish. He had merely spoken to the girl for a

few minutes, and yet he could not quite fathom his emotions. To some extent she had made him feel the same as had the man Jorak, and yet she liked him. She wanted to see more of him. She said so.

“Smith, you’re blushing again. I tell you what: if you can do that every day, then I will see you every day. It’s so nice and—unaffected.”

Was that the word she really had in mind? Smith remembered once when he was little, a farmer had come to the city and everyone had called him an ancient word which they said came from a still more ancient name. Rube they had called him. Rube. He didn’t like it. He had had a fight, Smith recalled, and a big plateglass window was broken. He went to jail for a few weeks on the moon, and after that he didn’t come to the city any more. Smith was little at the time, but he had never forgotten the look on the farmer’s face when the security officers took him off to the moon rocket.

Had he known it, Jorak would have used the word rube, but what about Geria?

The green number on the white door was painted sharply—4027. “Here’s my room,” Smith said. He tried an indifferent wave, but it hardly worked, and he began to blush again.

Geria skipped lightly down the hall, and he couldn’t see her face to tell if she were smiling. He shrugged, opened the door.

“EARTHSMITH! Oh, no . . . I come half way across the galaxy to get here, so what are the odds against any particular room mate? Huge, that’s what. But I got me—hello, Earthsmith.”

It was the purple man, Jorak. He had just recently greased his shock of bright green hair, and he had turned away from the mirror when Smith opened the door. Now he turned back to the tinted glass and held his head at various angles.

“Well, can you change rooms if you want to?” Smith asked pleasantly.

“You’re not going to chase me out of my own room, Earthsmith. You can change if you’d like. Not me.”

“All right if you want me to I’ll change.”

“If I want you to! Don’t pass the blame to me, Earthsmith. I didn’t say a thing about changing, not me. Don’t you think I’m good enough for you?”

“I don’t care one way or the other,” Smith said. “I suggested you change because I thought you’d be happier that way. Look, I’ll mind my own business and pretend you are not even here. How’s that?”

“Pretend I’m not here? Like cepheid you will. If you want to be ornery, Smith, or Earthsmith, or whatever your name is, I’ll give you plenty to be ornery about. I’m a dominant, you know, so just watch out.”

“I’ll change if that will make you happy.” Smith didn’t want any

trouble. He still felt more than a little strange and out of place here, and a fight with Jorak wouldn’t help matters. Briefly, he wondered what sort of psi powers Jorak possessed.

The purple man stood up. “What kind of a slap in the face is that? We haven’t even started courses or anything. You think I’d need you to help me with my work or something?”

“No, I’m quite sure you wouldn’t. But I’ll change my room, anyway. I’ll probably get in your way—”

“Well, I wouldn’t get into *your* hair, satellite-head! If you think you’re going to leave here and say I started a fight or something . . . My father made quite a record for himself here at the school, and I’ll have to beat it, of course.”

“Of course,” Smith agreed, but he did not really know why.

“Are you implying anyone, just anyone, could top my father’s record, Earthsmith? Not a man from Gyra ever did it, and intellectually Gyra is top planet in its own sector. Not a woman from Bortinot came close, but then, you probably don’t even know where Bortinot is.”

Smith said no, he didn’t, but he had just met a woman from Bortinot. Perhaps if he changed the subject . . .

Jorak ran his fingers up along each side of his shock of hair. They came away greasy green. “Exquisite, those women of Bortinot. But then, you probably wouldn’t appreci-

ate them, eh, Earthsmith?"

Smith said that he could appreciate them very well indeed, especially since, except for a few minor structural differences, they looked like women of Earth. It was a mistake, and the muscles in Jorak's cheeks began to twitch.

"I say they look exquisite, you say they look like women of Earth. Which is it, Earthsmith? Not both, surely—a contradiction in terms. I believe you're trying to provoke me."

Smith sighed. He wanted no trouble—they had spent a year with him on Earth, indoctrinating that. He was to be a paragon at the school; as Earth's first student there, he had to be a paragon—even if he turned out to be more awkward in this situation than the farmer on Earth everyone had called Rube.

"I think I will go to sleep," Smith said.

"Why, don't you men of Earth ever eat, Smith?"

Smith said yes, they ate, but he wasn't very hungry now. As a matter of fact, he was ravenously hungry, but he did not relish the idea of going to some public eating place either with Jorak or alone. His heart began to beat a little faster when he thought that he might meet Geria if he did, but then he felt the heat rise up his neck and into his cheeks. He'd hardly know what to say to her, and besides, he knew there was something he should remember but couldn't quite. No, he'd skip din-

ner this first day at the school.

Now he watched Jorak open the door and step into the hallway, and for a moment he heard gay voices and the shuffling of many feet, and Jorak's voice louder than the rest: "Kard of Shilon! How long has it been? I can remember that day near Ráginssild . . ."

Smith turned to the window, and for a long time he sat watching the fat red sun.

HE got up early and he showered, and then he heard a clicking sound. Two cards had been deposited in a tray from a slot in the wall. At the top of one were the words "Jorak of Gyra," and Smith's name and planet were printed on the other. He picked it up and began to read, and then Jorak sat up and took the other card.

"Programs," said Jorak. "Everyone takes transtellar history, of course, and a section or two in the humanities. My electives are Wortan fighting and dream-empathy."

Smith smiled. "Me too—same program. I suppose we'll be in class together, Jorak."

"Rather stupid," the purple man observed. "They've given you a dominant's program. But then, I remember you questioned your receptive classification, and the registrar's known to do this on occasion, just to put you in your place. You'll be in Garlonian dancing in a few days, Earthsmith."

"Well, I sure hope not. I didn't

come here to learn how to dance —”

“Hah! So what? If you’re an R you’ll learn how to dance and like it. Cook, too. There’s no such thing as a misfit at the school, not permanently. They’ll find you out soon enough, Earthsmith. Hmmm, wait till Kard of Shilon finds out what they’ve put in Wortan. Kard’s top man in his sector, and it’s just possible they’ll pair you off with him.

“Well, you going to eat this morning? I’d hate to see you in Wortan without a good meal in you. But I suppose it really wouldn’t help, anyway. Coming, Earthsmith?”

There weren’t any people out in the hall this early, and Smith breathed more easily when they moved in a direction opposite that of Geria’s room. Soon they had descended a score of levels, and the moving ramp became more crowded. Smith tried to ignore the eager hum of conversation, but it was all around him. He realized he should be feeling that way too. But you couldn’t drum up a student’s eager appetite within yourself, not when you didn’t feel that way, not when your entire planet waited to see how you made out here and you felt unsure of yourself, even in such simple things as eating.

That part of it at least turned out better than Smith had hoped. There were eggs, and while he was sure he would not recognize the fowl if he saw it, he could at least order his

over-light and get something familiar. And there were long strips of fatty meat which almost could have been bacon, except Smith was sure the pig wouldn’t be a pig at all.

And Smith was lost in the hordes of white men, green men, purple, orange and brown, and no one paid him too much attention. Jorak busied himself remembering old times with a gruff burly orange man named Kard, whose planet was Shilon, and Smith ate in silence. Once he thought he saw Geria far off at another table, but it could have been his imagination, and when he looked again she was gone.

Home, Smith always had been a quick eater, but now he found himself pawing at his food. Soon the great dining room began to clear. Jorak and Kard leaned back in their chairs, watching Smith.

Jorak yawned. “How long does it take you to breakfast?”

“Different rate of digestion on Earth,” Kard suggested.

“Don’t be foolish. Earthsmith’s in no hurry to attend his first class, so he’s loafing. Right, Earthsmith?”

Smith mumbled something about unfamiliar food under his breath, and Jorak said, “Well, no matter. We’ll give you another moment or two, Earthsmith. Then we’ll have to be going. We all three have transtellar history, you know.”

Smith knew it all too well. Gyra and Bortinot and Shilon were so many names to him and he silently cursed Earth’s provincial histories.

For those here at the school, the three names and a hundred others might be magical stepping stones to the culture, the lore; the history of a galaxy—but all Smith knew now was that Jorak came from Gyra, and so some of Gyra's people at least must be purple, that Geria came from Bortinot where the women were D and the men were R and where the women looked like those of Earth, that Kard, finally, came from a place that bore the name Shilon, where some of the men at least were orange. But Shilon could have been anyplace from the hub to the fringe, Gyra might swim dizzily out near Ophiuchus, or it might be the new culture name for one of Earth's near neighbors. And Bortinot—he wished he knew more about Bortinot.

THE instructor of transtellar history was a little fat man with a round gold face and green eyes that blinked too much. He wore the tight black uniform of the instructor and his green armband proclaimed his subject to be history. He smiled too much, too vacantly, as if he had been practicing it a long time and now forgot what it really meant.

"Greetings!" he cried jovially, after everyone had been seated on the long low benches around the room. "I bring you history. No one is to talk unless I tell him to. Everyone is to listen unless I tell him not to. Clear?" He smiled.

No one said anything.

"Excellent. History encompasses thousands of years and countless cubic parsecs. Only the big things count. We will forget the little things. Little things belong to little people and we of the school are the elite of a transtellar culture. Questions?"

There were none.

"Good, because I have some. What would you say was the first event of importance? Luog of Panden, talk."

Said green-skinned Luog, a very young Pandenian: "You mean ever?"

"I would have specified had I meant otherwise. Yes, ever. Talk, Luog of Panden."

"Well—"

"Halt a moment, please. Who thinks the question is a relative one which cannot properly be answered? I claim it is Brandog of Hulpin."

An albino woman three seats down from Smith flushed. "I am sorry," she said.

"Who told you to talk now? This is not Hulpin, Brandog. The course is intensive. You must concentrate. Concentrate, concentrate, concentrate. No extraneous thoughts." The instructor smiled. "Luog of Panden, talk."

Smith felt the little beads of sweat forming on his forehead. The instructor could read minds—and how many of these others could? They just sat there as if it were the most natural thing in the world . . .

Only Brandog of Hulpin seemed ruffled, and it would be many moments before her albino skin looked again like soft alabaster. But no one seemed to notice. Luog was saying, "—exodus from the prehistoric Sirian worlds to the first culture in the Denebian system, the Var one. More than ten thousand Vars ago."

"Satisfactory for a Receptive, Luog of Panden," the instructor smiled. "The Dominants would go back a bit further and talk of the Sirian wars, but that much is a matter of opinion, since the wars are largely mythical, anyway. And so we have set the stage for history. We have—"

SMITH wanted to get up indignantly and tell the instructor, tell them all, what the most glorious epochs of history really were. You would find it in the museums of earth, on the plaques and in the statues and on the old old records of Earth. There was a lot Smith wanted to tell them because there was so much only he could tell them, so much they had forgotten.

But he merely sat and stared politely at the black-uniformed instructor. You don't show yourself as a provincial—what was the word?—rube, not when your culture, while temporarily the oldest, is in a lot of ways the most neophyte of them all.

You just sat and stared, looking interested.

The instructor's voice cut into his thoughts, "Earth of Smith—"

"Smith of Earth," he said, automatically.

"I did not tell you to talk, Smith of Earth. And if your card says Earth of Smith, how am I to know? A mistake, yes—but an understandable one. I'm a historian, and I have heard of neither planet. Where is this Earth? Talk, Smith!"

He stood up, although it wasn't really necessary, and he could feel his knees trembling slightly. "Earth is a few parsecs from Sirius, and Sirius I think you know."

"I know Sirius. Now talk!"

"What is it you want me to say? I don't feel much like talking—"

"Yet you speak so loud that the room fairly rocks with it. I wanted you to tell us why you did not agree with the answer just now rendered. It is, I feel, a good one. Talk."

"Then I agree, it is a good one." Smith did not want to get involved. He wanted to be a good, quietly efficient student. Nothing more. But he forgot that the instructor could read minds.

"You lie, Smith of Earth. I won't go into it any further, because it is your privilege if you want to lie. But you are not to listen for the remainder of this lecture. Do not listen."

Smith nodded, cursed himself mentally because he had made such a mess of things here at his very first lecture, and headed for the

door.

"Smith of Earth! Just where under the red sun do you think you are going?"

"You told me not to listen, so—"

"I didn't say talk. Talk now."

"—so I'm leaving the room."

"No one leaves until the lecture has been concluded. Sit if you will, or stand, but stay here. And do not listen."

Smith nodded, turned back to the row of benches dumbly. He found a place next to Brandog of Hulpin, sat near the albino woman. Down the bench, he saw Jorak grinning broadly. Smith did not know how he was going to sit there without listening, but he decided he'd better not ask that question now.

"THIS is your course in Wortan fighting," boomed the giant of an instructor. "Dominants only, or such Receptives as question their classification." The instructor's massive face was beefy, the color of new-spilled blood, and the muscles rippled and bulged and seethed under his black uniform.

"Me for this!" confided Kard of Shilon, slapping Smith's back. "Perhaps Jorak has told you that I am not without ability on the Wortan mats."

Smith hardly heard him. Two dozen paces across the room, on the other side of the circle that surrounded the instructor, stood Geria, hands on hips, lips soft-smiling when she saw Smith, silver tunic to her

knees, yellow hair hanging free to shoulders.

"Join me, Smith of Earth?" she called, and knees watery again, Smith made his way around the circle.

While Jorak gaped, Geria took Smith's hand when they met half way around the circle, and she smiled up at him. "I wouldn't have believed it, but you're blushing again. Earth trait, Smith?"

"No, not really," he stammered.

The slim girl was about to say something, but the instructor cleared his throat ominously, and the room became silent again. "Now, then," declared the giant, "there's no trick to fighting with psi-powers. Anyone can do that, and the women of Bortinot, as you know, are particularly adept. But the people of Wortan have no such powers, and they must depend on tooth and nail, on sinew and bone and animal cunning. Such is the way the Wortanians do battle—and, purely for sport, such is the way of Wortan fighting. Any questions?"

"Yes," Geria told him, "I have one. Are we not permitted to use any psi powers?"

"None. They disqualify you."

"Well, then I suppose I must withdraw from the course. I can't be expected to stand up to a man physically. I'm not built that way—and very few women are, Dominant or Receptive."

Smith had not expected this, but now he felt a warm glow in his

breast. He almost wanted to put his arm about the woman's shoulders, protectively. How could such a delicate beautiful thing be expected to fight?

The instructor said, "I won't argue with you. I can't remember a woman ever lasting in Wortan fighting, but if they're Dominants they're automatically entered. The rest of you can do like—"

The words came out before Smith could stop them. "In that case, can anyone tell me the difference between a Dominant and a Receptive?"

There was a lot of laughter in the room, and Smith thought it would have been the same had he, as a child, asked the difference between boy and girl. "Ah, old Earthsmith!" he heard Jorak's voice. "Everytime he opens his mouth new wisdom spews forth."

Pale eyes looked out of the instructor's blood-red face. "Obviously, you're joking. I'm here to answer questions, among other things, but you couldn't be serious."

And Smith heard his own dull voice reply:

"No, certainly not. I was only joking."

Said Geria, "Silly, a Dominant has more psi powers, that's all. But you really didn't know, did you?"

"There are no psi powers on Earth to speak of," Smith reminded her.

"Hmm, very true. In that case, maybe you're all Receptives—male and female. But don't feel too bad-

ly, Smith; Wortan's the same way, and Wortan has a first-rate culture. Look: they even have an instructor here at the school."

THE instructor of Wortan fighting was a Wortanian, of course. And here, in Wortan fighting, Smith might feel at home. But he hardly expected to excel at the school by breaking someone's back, or pinning him helplessly to the Wortan mat. Suddenly he found himself thinking of Earth, thinking of the trust that had been put in him as Earth's first student at the school. But his thoughts did not remain there long—his eyes took in the soft yellow of Geria's hair, and Earth faded far away.

"—volunteers," the instructor was saying. "Does anyone want to step on the mat with me for a fall or two?"

"I recommend Earthsmith," came Jorak's voice. "Positively—Earthsmith's your man."

Smith felt his face becoming very red again, but Geria nudged him with an elbow. "Go ahead, Smith—why not? You told me once you didn't fear anyone in the room of the registrar, not in physical combat. Go ahead."

"I know, but—"

"Go ahead, Smith. Show me."

He could do that. Yes, he could show her. But what if he were wrong—they might know a trick or two that would make him look foolish. And he wouldn't want that,

not in front of Geria. "I am tired," he said. "I didn't sleep well last night."

The instructor rescued him. "I didn't ask you to recommend. I asked for volunteers. But you who spoke; what's your name?"

"I am Jorak of Gyra," said Jorak, purple face paling.

"You'll do. On the mat, man of Gyra."

Jorak stepped forward, slowly, in no hurry to meet the giant. Smith heard Kard's mocking laugh. "Ho, Jorak—he'll tear you in half. Now if he had asked for a man of Shilon . . . a real man . . ."

And still laughing, the Shilonian heaved mightily with both his hands and sent Jorak stumbling out onto the mat. The man of Gyra fell and skidded on his stomach, turned over once and finally came up into a sitting position at the instructor's feet. Kard was grinning, but Jorak saw nothing funny in what had happened. He stood up slowly, wheezing, and his gaze raked the circle. It flicked past Kard rapidly, kept going, poised a moment on Geria, then reached Smith. Jorak shook his fist. "All right, Earthsmith. I'll get you for this."

Geria smiled. "I would say that you have an enemy there."

The instructor bellowed a warning and came for Jorak.

FOR some reason Smith found he couldn't keep his eyes off the fray, and he found his own breath

coming in ragged gasps. Geria watched with a dispassionate interest. "Poor man of Gyra," she said. "It might be a different story if he could use some of his psi powers. The men of Gyra have a little of that, you know."

"Well, why can't he?"

"He'd be disqualified, shamed—and maybe worse. I never knew that psi powers were not permitted on the Wortan mat, but I did know that the rules must be adhered to rigidly."

The instructor's massive body stood between them and Jorak, and one of the great arms circled the man of Gyra's neck. Jorak's purple face glared straight at Smith; and his body thrashed and wriggled furiously, like a snake; head held fast by a forked stick. Abruptly, the instructor stepped back and let go. Jorak fell and lay writhing on the mat, legs and arms pounding.

"Brute strength is what we want in Wortan," said the instructor, smoothing his black uniform.

Said Kard of Shilon: "You outweigh Jorak, but I see your point. I wonder how you would do with a man of Shilon."

The instructor smiled. "Well, we will pair off now. You can select me, if you wish. Those who want to drop out of the course, step back from the circle. We need room—"

All the women moved away, slowly, reluctantly. They were Dominants, every one, and Smith sensed they longed to use their psi powers.

Some of them trembled nervously from the exhibition they had seen, some wiped sweat from white and pink and green brow. One tall albino woman seemed hesitant, stepped back toward the circle, but she backed away again when a gold man big as Kard of Shilon strode forward eagerly.

Against the wall stood the dozen women, rapt eyes intent on the men as they paired off. And this, Smith thought bitterly, is culture. This is what Earth had missed by closing its star lanes. Well, Earth . . .

"Don't sulk, Smith of Earth," Geria told him, and Smith realized, shamefully, that he had slunk off with the women. "I say there is something glorious about fighting tooth and nail. Not depraved, certainly, unless you insist on judging it by a hidebound ethic. Go back to the mats, Smith—for me."

He looked long at the woman, saw no guile in her eyes. Who was he to judge? Could he dare pass judgment on a society that had left Earth behind a score of thousand years ago? The men of Earth hadn't sent him here, half way across the galaxy to do that.

HE turned and walked stiffly to the mats. By now the men had paired off two and two, stood facing each other in pairs. Kard of Shilon and the thick-thewed instructor, great gold man and chunky red, reed-slender green man and giant orange, albinos two like alabaster

statues.

From the circle came Jorak, hands to bruised neck. He stopped, looked Smith up and down grimly, smiled. "You have no partner, Earthsmith?"

"I'm looking for one."

"Well, look no more. I am tired and hurt, but I'd like to join you on the mat." He shrugged. "Of course, if you're afraid—"

Smith still did not feel like fighting. It might as well be Jorak as any other—he certainly had more reason to fight Jorak. Vaguely, it seemed a needless expenditure of energy. But he had done it again: he had put the shoe on the wrong foot—he, Smith, stood up for judgment, not the school. "Good enough, Jorak," he said.

In a moment, the instructor signaled them all to begin, and Smith had one brief look at the dozen pairs of men, grappling, heard the instructor shout, "one fall, and one fall only!" And then Jorak was upon him.

Jorak seemed for all the world like a snake, writhing and twisting with a deceptive sinewy strength. But calmly Smith stepped out of his reach, cuffing his ears roundly when he came too close.

"You're afraid, afraid, afraid!" Jorak taunted. "Fight!"

Smith shrugged. If he did not want to fight, he did not want to. But the women hooted, and they were hooting him, all but Geria who remained glumly silent.

"This is getting me nowhere," Jorak hissed. "You're making me look like a fool, Earthsmith." Perspiration bathed the purple face, stained the sides of Jorak's tunic darkly.

And then he smiled. Smith felt giddy, hardly could keep his legs under him, yet hardly had Jorak touched him. Then the man of Gyra was using his psi powers, despite the sanction. Oddly, Smith felt detached from it all. Let him use his powers then—that would end it. Let him . . .

"Fight back, Smith!" Ge'ia cried.

Jorak's powers were not like the woman's. He could induce giddiness, yes, but not in any overpowering quantities. Smith swayed foolishly, tipped first to left, then to right, stood for a moment with arms at sides. Jorak rushed upon him and struck out with both fists, and Smith stumbled back half a dozen steps, crashed into a pair of struggling figures, was dimly aware that both fell.

Jorak came on, cocky, confident, and Smith rocked for a moment on the balls of his feet. Once and once only he lashed out with his right arm, smeared Jorak's nose flat against his face. Jorak toppled backward and fell, writhing.

Smith looked around him, panting. The other contestants ceased their struggles, and the instructor said:

"Someone has used psi. I don't

know who, but someone—"

Jorak pointed weakly, said, "Earthsmith!"

"Snap judgment," the instructor admitted. "Your word only. Still, you alone were bested, Jorak of Gyra—and, hah, that makes twice, doesn't it?"

"Once with psi," said Jorak.

"You sure?"

"I ought to know what hit me! He held me rigid, I tell you, and then he struck me. What could I do? I ask you, what?"

Smith knew that the instructor could read minds—with limitations. He knew the psi power had been used, but he did not know who had used it.

J JORAK wiped the blood from his face with the back of one hand. "Listen," he confided, "Earthsmith is a savage, really and truly, of the planet Earth. Terribly barbaric. Obviously, he'd have no compunctions against dirty fighting."

"Well—" said the instructor.

"There's only one thing wrong with all this," Smith told him. "Nobody on Earth uses psi-power."

Jorak slapped his hand against the mat. "Then you admit that there are psi powers on Earth?"

"Yes," Smith said. "There are psi-powers on Earth." Things were happening to Smith. He felt vague stirrings inside of him, and he dampened them.

"There. He admits it," Jorak said. "The men of Earth are not

without their psi powers, and Smith or Earthsmith—I still don't know the barbarian's name—used them on me.” He shook his fist. “You just can't trust these barbarians.”

The instructor still did not seem sure of himself, but there were angry mutterings in the crowd, and the albino woman who had almost but not quite joined the fighters said, “Let me try a fall with him. Probably I would lose, but we of Nugat can preceive the psi powers readily.”

Smith stormed away from her, felt hot anger rushing through him. “I wouldn't fight with a woman.”

Jorak taunted, “He's afraid she'll discover—”

“Nothing! I'm afraid of nothing, Jorak. I just won't fight a woman.” He was shouting now, and he couldn't help it. Again, there was the odd feeling that part of his mind at least stood away from all this, observing, shaking its head and telling him to curb his temper.

A hand lay heavily on his shoulder, big gnarled, orange. “Kard of Shilon would like a fall with you, Earthsmith of Earth. Perhaps I am not as subtle as the woman from Nugat, but still I think I could tell.”

The instructor nodded, and Kard spun Smith around, kept him spinning with a short chopping blow to his jaw. Smith hardly felt it. But something told him deep inside his whirling brain to fall, fall, fall—and the faintest shadow of a smile

flickered across Jorak's lips.

Win or lose—what was the difference? Those who could would feel the psi-powers, and Smith would be their man.

By crotch and collar he caught the huge man of Shilon, lifted him. Kard's arms and legs flailed air, helplessly. He bellowed as Smith began to whirl; slowly at first, but then faster. Up he raised the great orange hulk, held it aloft on outstretched arms for one moment—hurled it.

Arms and legs still flailing wildly, Kard struck the mat, seemed almost to bounce, landed in a heap atop Jorak.

Geria jumped up and down delightedly, but the woman of Nugat scowled. “Psi,” she said. “I felt it.”

“As did I,” admitted the instructor. “Faintly. Smith of Earth —”

“Don't tell me you didn't see me use my arms then, just my arms?”

“Kard appeared awful helpless—”

“I felt the psi,” said the woman of Nugat.

“And I,” a man agreed.

“As I said,” Jorak declared smugly, “when you bring a barbarian to the school you must expect barbarous behavior. Oh well,” he stifled a yawn, “I'll get my nose fixed, of course, but this sort of thing could continue. Unpleasant, is it not?”

The instructor nodded slowly, dismissed class.

66. **D**ID you or didn't you, Smith?"

"What do you think, Geria?"

"I'd say no, but I did feel the psi when you threw Kard."

"That was Jorak—and he used it on me."

"Not very strong then, because I remember how readily I—"

"Look, Geria. What's the difference? They've made up their minds, and I can't do a thing about it. I didn't use the psi, I can tell you that and you'll believe me. But it doesn't matter, really. They're convinced. What happens next?"

The woman, of Bortinot frowned. "I don't know. They could expel you possibly. You forget I'm new at the school, too. Let's forget all about it. You will, anyway, in dream empathy."

It was easy for her to say that, but Smith couldn't forget. The more he had tried to convince them he had not employed the psi-power, could not employ it, the more they thought that he did. He was of Earth—primitive by their standards, a barbarian. They had said so. Culture had leaped past Earth in all directions, had leaped so far that he could not even recognize it as such, had encompassed the stars and broad new concepts as big as the parsecs of space between the stars. How could he understand—ever?

Or was there anything to understand? If he could take everything at its face value, if he could trust his own judgment, this was not

culture at all. But he had forgotten again: his judgment didn't matter. He was being judged, not the school.

"—be strictly a neophyte in dream empathy," Geria was saying. "But not me. I've had my share of it on Bortinot, and they'll be pairing us off, experienced and novice. I'll take you as a partner if you'd like, Smith."

"You bet I'd like it!" He felt genuinely cheerful again, quite suddenly. Geria was the one bright spot at the school, and at least he had that. And yet there was something he could not remember, something pushing against the fringes of consciousness, and it concerned Geria. What actually had happened yesterday on the crags? He could remember, remember—but he couldn't at all, not really, and somehow he knew that the most important item of all remained tantalizingly close, yet just beyond his immediate reach.

He said, "Just what is this dream empathy?"

"Now you *are* joking."

"No. I don't know a thing about it."

"What do you people of Earth do for entertainment?"

"Well, we talk, or we dance, or we play games, ride horses, take walks in the country, see a show—anything anyone else does, I guess."

"No one else does any of that, because d.e.'s a lot better. You know anything about dreams, Smith?"

"A little. Very little. They've always been something of a mystery on Earth."

"Well, do you read or watch the telios on Earth?"

"Of course. But it's strictly local stuff on Earth. That's why I'm here."

"Well, if it's fiction, why do you read?"

"Excitement I guess. Interest, suspense. I watch the hero, I struggle with him, succeed when he does if the book's a good one—"

"Exactly. You go into empathy with him. Smith—how would you like to do that—with me?"

"Hunh?"

"Take a dream. I dream it, not you. It's a good one, under control. A vivid dream, more real than life itself in a lot of ways, emotions highlighted, maintained, increased—and exactly what I want to dream, because I know we'll both like it."

"I dream it, not you. But you feel it with me. You grow tired of your own thoughts, so you switch in on someone else's. Control there. Gorgeous dreams, fantastic dreams, even horrible ones, if both would like it. Complete empathy—in a dream world."

"Then later, when you're experienced, you dream and I emp. How does it sound, Smith?"

He smiled. "Not much privacy. But I'd be a liar if I said I wouldn't want to take a peek at your dreams, Geria. It sounds fine."

Geria laughed softly, a lilting feminine sound. "It's a little more private than that, provided I know what I'm doing. There's a control. I can dream what I want, and can restrict it. You'll see."

Smith very much wanted to see. Almost, he forgot about Jorak and the psi-power. But briefly in his mind he saw the black uniformed giant from Wortan, felt again the flailing Kard raised high overhead, saw accusation in the woman of Nugat's eyes . . .

THEY lay on two adjacent couches, Smith and the woman of Bortinot. A bare cubicle of a room with just the two couches in it. A door, now closed, led into a room in which they had received their instructions. But Smith hardly had listened. Geria knew the game well enough, and he'd let it go at that. The rasping voice of the female instructor had annoyed him, anyway, but he noticed that she was a woman of Bortinot, not beautiful like Geria, but of her planet nonetheless.

"Psi powers again," Geria told him. "Hypnotism and telepathy mostly. You'll see . . ."

Something which looked like a candle-flame seen through a long dark tube flickered from the ceiling. It came closer, steadied, flickered no more. Smith couldn't draw his eyes away from it.

"You're asleep," Geria told him, matter-of-factly.

He was. Not really, because in

sleep there was a lack of awareness. But he could not move and everything was dark and he could only think.

He felt nothing. Absolutely nothing. A mind without a body, in complete darkness. The tingle of awareness which you hardly regard as such because it always is with you was gone. Nothing.

And then it returned. He felt his heart beating again. His ear itched and he scratched it. He shifted his left arm which had fallen asleep.

Oddly, the ceiling light had moved. It had been just to the right of center—now it was just to the left, flickering again, retreating. It was gone.

He turned over on his left side, sleepily, contentedly—on the brink of real sleep. Geria knew what she was doing. He'd rest. He looked—at his own sleeping figure!

Madness toyed with the edges of his mind, gained inroads, made him look again. The silent figure to his left—himself. He raised his hands, felt the hair, long, flowing, billowing about his head—looked down, could see the gentle rounded rise of breast.

A voice nibbled at consciousness, repeated itself, became clearer, laughing: "*We will go to sleep now, Smith. How does it feel to be here with me? Let's dream. Dream—*"

The voice reassured, and Smith-Geria relaxed, slept.

* * *

He, Geria of Bortinot — really she, then—stood on a hill. A weathered hill and aged, on a frigid world where winds of winter raged and howled and battered mountains into submissive mounds. Fearful place, grim and almost dead it was—and yet he liked it. Smiling, he stood atop the hill and bade the tempest strike. The winds hurled him headlong and he stumbled; but he felt elated, wild and free, part of the elements that did battle there in that country of the weathered hills. And there were others and they were men. They came up the hill and they tried to take him in their arms, strong men and fair, but he ran laughing with the wind. His identity faded in that wind, was torn to tatters by it—left only was Geria of Bortinot, her feelings, her thoughts, but his awareness.

She stumbled, fell, turned over and over, much too slowly. Winds still howled, but above her here at hill's bottom. Wraiths of fog swirled in eddying gusts, came closer and faded, appeared again and swept away.

She cried a name because the fog brought her an image and the name and the image were one. "Smith of Earth, of Earth, of Earth . . ." And he came to her, this image, on a charger, an animal much too thick through the shoulders to be a horse, with three pairs of legs. Low out of saddle he leaned, graceful, handsome bald head pink with excitement. He

clutched at her, lifted her through the mists, above them. The six-legged horse soared high, above the hills, above the winds, carried her higher and higher. Smith stroked her yellow hair, kissed her. She tingled . . .

* * *

"Wake up Smith! Up, come on now, the class is over for today."

He stirred. The dream—Gods of Earth, what a dream!

"Well, how'd you like it? See what I mean about dream empathy, Smith? Beats everything, doesn't it?"

Smith hardly heard her. They say dreams fulfill wishes, they say—and what was it Geria had dreamed? Suddenly, it was very important to Smith, terribly important, more important than anything, because he remembered, without knowing how or why, what had happened yesterday on the crags.

"Geria," he said. He tried to make his voice soft, but it boomed loudly, almost startled her.

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing. Why nothing is the matter. You remember yesterday on the crag, Geria?"

She nodded.

"And your dream—Geria?"

Again, the casual nod.

"Geria, I—I love you. I think I want to marry you. I think—"

He stopped. She looked at him for what seemed a long time but really was only a few seconds, and then she grinned. There was noth-

ing malicious about it, Smith knew, just a grin. It spread, and the woman of Bortinot began to laugh. Softly at first, but soon she was laughing very hard and Smith felt foolish. He wanted very much to be out of there, anyplace but in that room, but he did not know for sure that he knew how to operate the door.

"Oh, Smith, Smith," she said, "if you could see yourself now. But I suppose I deserve it. I planted the suggestion, you fought it, now you're pretending. All right, I admit defeat. But stop now; you should see your face."

Serious. She was serious. She thought he was joking. Post-suggestively you tried to get someone to do something—anything, and it was very very funny if they did. Funnier yet if they didn't, because then they beat you at your own game, made fun of you, laughed at you, but eventually with you. Of course it was like that, let her think it was like that.

He smiled. "All right, I'll—stop."

And together, laughing, they walked out of the room. Smith was surprised to find he had no trouble at all with the door.

JORAK had a friendly smile for Smith when he entered their room. "There's a card for you in the box, Smith. Read it." Jorak, it seemed, had stopped playing with his name. Smith took the card, read it.

"Smith of Earth, report to Registrar at once."

"You know why, don't you?" Jorak asked him. But the smile was no longer friendly.

"How should I know?"

"Trouble, that's what. But you asked for it. Psi and Wortan don't mix, barbarian."

Smith was glad when he hardly felt any impulse to strike the purple man. But he said, mocking Jorak's own tones, "Don't provoke me," and Jorak cowered in a corner.

SMITH looked into the banks of the Registrar's lights, spoke into the speaker. "Smith of Earth," he said. This time his voice didn't boom with loudness. And it didn't seem to matter much anymore.

And this time, the Registrar's voice wasn't so femininely petulant. It sounded masculine, authoritative.

"Smith of Earth. Item. Garnot of Jlob feels you are an inferior history student, recommends withdrawal from the school.

"Item: Sog-chafka of Wortan announces your wanton use of psi-powers in Wortan fighting, recommends clemency because you are a barbarian.

"Item: Kard of Shilon wants to meet you in Wortan again. Promises to kill you.

"Item: both Jorak of Gyra and Geria of Bortinot have questioned your mentality, want you tested."

Vaguely Smith listened. He felt removed, resigned. But then cer-

tain words struck hard . . .

" . . . Geria of Bortinot questions your mentality . . .

"Smith of Earth. Are you listening?"

"I'm listening," Smith said.

"I feel you have two choices," the Registrar said. "We can request your withdrawal from the school, or we can keep you here under observation and give you an exhaustive battery of tests. The decision is in your hands."

" . . . Geria of Bortinot questions your mentality . . . "

" . . . the decision is in your hands."

Jorak moved, slipped along the wall. His face was sneering and fearful too. The purple mask of his face seemed to swim before Smith's eyes like something seen through watered glass. Smith was pacing. He felt the emotions beginning to work yeastily and he longed to take that face and twist it off its snaky neck.

"You had better go back to Earth, Smith," Jorak said. "Wherever it is."

Abruptly, Smith felt the tendons writhing between his hands. He lifted. He held the squirming figure off the floor, held it there and looked into it curiously.

"You'd better use some of your psi-power, my little green friend," Smith said, "While you can."

The green face was turning purple. Words choked off somewhere down in the tubular length of the

neck. Smith could feel it now! He could feel it! And he knew. The desperate tendrils of psi-power flailing out. And Smith began to smile.

"I could tell you some things, Jorak. You have some psi-power, but that and anything else you've got, including some very bad features, you got them all from Earth. You got the germs for it all a long time back. And what you have left is just something that's a kind of left-over after a few thousand years. The Earth has forgotten more psi-power, friend, than you'll ever have."

Jorak's eyes popped. Veins were coloring thickly through them.

"You're here to learn something, Jorak. Listen. We developed psi-power on Earth so long ago we don't bother remembering when it was."

Smith felt the power all right. Latent psi-power, dormant and unused for aeons.

He threw Jorak into the corner. Jorak curled up there, sucking in air and rubbing his bruised neck.

"We had it. We threw it away," Smith said. "We had a defense against it too. But we don't use psi, or the defense anymore. We outgrew it. It had its day and then we forgot about it, Jorak. Why? We lost interest. Individual sanctity was better. Privacy of the human mind was something a lot more to be desired than being able to pry into someone else's brain, or

vice versa. But you take a lot of pride, Jorak, in having a little residue floating around."

Smith grinned more widely. It was funny in a way, and sad too. And he didn't particularly care about pushing it any further.

"... the decision is in your hands."

HE wished his thoughts would organize, fuse somehow with the stirring, rebelling emotions. Integration right now was vital. You lose, or you're not equal to something. And a really top-notch defense-mechanism will turn the whole thing around and say IT is not equal to YOU. That's a danger. And of that he was afraid.

Could he, should he, pass judgment? On a culture that had left Earth wallowing in the cosmic backwaters? Twice, thrice, he had tried to pass that judgment, but he could not. He should be judged, theoretically, not the school.

So what if their concept of history was primitive, basking in its own importance, ignoring the philosophical precepts upon which the social sciences are based? Surely they had reason, and he shouldn't question . . .

And if they valued Wortan fighting above all else . . . if it made their women look like eager animals waiting to see the blood spill . . . how could he question? Why should he dare assume that the whole culture was depraved, simply because

he regarded it that way by Earth standards?

And their dream empathy was enjoyable, he had to admit that—but it was too enjoyable. No wonder Earth had dropped that sort of thing long ago. It was a good gimmick to divert attention from important things. It was also regressive, a kind of sick introversion. It was decadence, an invasion of privacy, an offense against the dignity of human privacy of the mind—the individual's last precarious citadel.

He jumped a little when the Registrar barked: "Your decision, Smith of Earth."

He smiled at the bank of lights. He had broad duties. He had a duty to Earth. And an indirect duty to the Galaxy. He should report all this. And Earth should try to do something to bring many worlds out of sloth, decadence, regression and inverted self-importance.

But first of all, a man had a duty to himself, his own psychic health. Maybe the two weren't inseparable either. Maybe Earth would share the humiliation if he Smith, suffered its scars to remain on him.

He wanted to consider himself as more than a mere projection of Earth, more than a mere symbol. He was of Earth, sure. But first of all he was Smith. Just plain Smith. A guy with a human spirit, with dignity that could be affronted and had been here.

He thought of Geria, of what that dream empathy had suggested. He felt her lips again, the softly curving line of her hips under the silver tunic to her knees, the yellow hair falling free to shoulders . . .

—"Your decision, Smith of Earth," the Registrar's voice was louder.

"I'm not going back to Earth," said Smith softly. "Yet."

He watched Jorak slipping up the side of the wall, then rushing out the exit.

Smith went to the exit too, then into the hall. He started walking down it, and the smile clung to his lips like an old memory.

FROM the monochromatic light harmonies playing softly from the walls; from the abstract gentleness of music that never stopped filtering through the gardens and over the mists of fountains, from the ever-cruscating and subdued twilight that surrounded the school—from these things, Smith extracted the tone of decadence, the static, hide-bound turning of a wheel upon itself.

The women from Bortinot stared oddly at him as his bulk, high and broad passed near. He heard their whispers . . . "barbarian . . . savage . . ."

His smile broadened. The cycle closed. Strange, how the old became decadent, and the young revolted and itself became sophisticated and sick, and the old became young again and the old values

turned fresh and clear like a tree blooming out of winter's snow.

The sounds of voices died abruptly as Smith went in. Faces turned . . . Brandog of Hulpin with the albino skin like alabaster; Luog the young, green-skinned Pandenian . . . varieties of form and color . . . the white, pink, orange and green brows. But there was the sameness of inversion and static culture.

Mouths gaped as Smith strode up to the front of the class room in transtellar history and looked curiously at the little man with the round gold face and green eyes that still blinked too much, and who, even now, smiled too much, too vacantly, as if he had been practicing a long time and had forgotten what it meant.

But Garnot of Jlob's smile was slightly strained now and his face had a pale look, under its sheath of gold.

"What a boorish intrusion," the instructor said. His voice got higher. "The entire school knows of course, Earth of Smith. . . ."

"Smith of Earth," Smith said softly.

"Whatever it is, the entire school knows that already you have disgraced yourself and your planet—which was to be expected. And that I have recommended your withdrawal from the school as an inferior student."

"And so," Smith said.

"Therefore, it should be obvious that you are not particularly wel-

come as a member of this class. Surely you have not chosen to remain, and even if you have, it should be obvious that you will not be part of any class of mine until you have successfully passed certain tests, and have been kept under observation. Need I add that after you have taken these tests, we will not be expecting you to remain . . ."

Several students giggled.

"I'm going to talk now, Garnot of Jlob," Smith said. "You asked me questions earlier. Now I'm going to answer them."

"But I did not . . ."

"They're questions that should be answered, even though I'm not at all sure that there's enough free-thought here to grasp the real meaning of what I'm going to say."

"I did not tell you to talk."

"I'm Smith of Earth, and this is supposedly a free institution. On Earth I wasn't accustomed to being told when I could talk, when I could listen, when I could think. You asked me once where Earth is. I'll tell you."

"But I do not care and . . ."

"Earth, interstellarly speaking, is a few parsecs from Sirius. Spaceographically speaking, it isn't very important where it is, not really. Historically, it was at the apex of civilized culture before Jlob ever existed except as a steaming carboniferous swamp peopled largely by a species of amphibian. Socio-psychologically, Earth is a few aeons ahead of the worlds so badly repre-

sented here."

"You have not been told to talk!" screamed Garnot of Jlob.

"But you are supposed to listen," Smith insisted. A gasp sounded through the room. "You asked what was the first interstellar event of importance. I'm going to tell you." He turned so that he was looking at the class. "It wasn't the exodus from the prehistoric Sirian worlds to the first culture in the Denebian system. Nor was it the Sirian wars. Those things didn't set the stage for Interstellar history. Interstellar history had already begun and grown old on the planet Earth, half a million years before . . ."

An intensity boiled up through the wick of Smith's body. "The question itself is shallow, meaningless in an academic sense. It was asked only to be answered in such a way as to reinforce egotistical concepts of culture. The most important event in Interstellar history was when men on the planet Earth developed speech perhaps, or some other event even long before that . . . and started the scientific process that led finally to the most glorious epoch in history. And what was that? I can remember with pride the engravings of the first proud Earth ships that blasted off for the Centaurian system aeons ago. And other pictures of the early days of the new Centaurian culture, and still others. Of discontent and overpopulation. And the migration to Sirius.

"Or even earlier, of the stern, thin-lipped face of Matthew Merkle whose tincan of a spaceship carved a loop in space around the Moon—a satellite of Earth—and returned.

"You think of history in terms of challenge and response, and the earlier challenges were the most significant ones." It was harder to get a spaceship across a mere quarter of a million miles to the Moon then, than it is to send it, translight, to the farthest star today."

Garnot of Jlob was quivering. His face had a deep purplish cast.

Smith turned completely around, his back to the instructor.

"If you want the truth about interstellar history, my friends, come to Earth. That was where it started. That's where anything decent about it has remained. And I'm not at all sure that Earth isn't where it will end . . . if it ever really ends."

Half way to the exit, he turned to Garnot of Jlob. "You can stop trying to use psi-power to make me shut up, you pompous phony."

Laughing softly, Smith went out and down the hall. Behind him he heard a loud coughing as though someone was choking.

THE word had spread before him to the room where Sog-chafka of Wortan, and Kard of Shilon, and the crowd waited. The two giants were on the mats and around the rows of up-circling benches, were the eager, hungry faces of the women of Bortinot. The Dominants, their

lips moist and slightly open and their eyes shiny with anticipation.

Geria stared at him, her body shifting slightly, her lips apart and her teeth shining white, eyes glistening. He remembered how the kiss had been. He smiled at her. She seemed scornful now, a little sad, pitying, as he walked onto the mats.

"Ah, Earthsmith," boomed the instructor. His massive blood-colored face was shiny as he stood there, muscles rippling and seething under the black uniform. Kard of Shilon grinned. The spectators laughed as Smith tripped on the mat and almost sprawled.

Kard of Shilon said. "I'm going to kill you, Earthsmith."

Smith said. "That's an odd way to express your elite tastes, Kard, but I can understand how you feel. Earth knew a lot of killing in its day."

To Sog-chafka, Smith said. "You accused me of using psi-power in Wortan fighting. It was kind of you to recommend clemency. However, I deny the accusation."

"He has psi-power," screamed Jorak of Gyra from the top bench. He shook green fists.

"You said only a few Earthmen had psi-power," Sog-chafka said.

"I didn't. I said it's never used on Earth. There's a difference."

"You said you . . ."

"Didn't use it," Smith said. "What psi-power you have, came from Earth. We of Earth developed it. But it's been a long time since we

have bothered with it. But though I'm a little bit rusty now, I'll show you—"

None of them ever knew what a dreadful moment that was for Smith . . . who knew his capacity for psi-power; but had never bothered to use it before.

He concentrated.

Twenty Dominant women of Wortan fell writhing on the mats.

They writhed for a while, then got up and sat down again. Perspiration was heavy on their faces, and they panted heavily, and their eyes were slightly glazed with psychic shock.

Smith's head ached. But he would never show it. He was rusty, all right.

Sog-chafka and Kard shifted once and seemed uneasy.

Smith said. "I did that to demonstrate a point, which is that if I want to use psi-power here, I'll not fool around with any puny amount of it such as I was accused of doing earlier: I prefer fighting the Wortan way. Psi-power fighting is pretty unhealthy stuff. Minds getting all wrapped up together in combat. It's finally like beating yourself . . ."

Smith laughed at the two giants. "Well," he said.

Kard rushed. Smith dropped to hands and knees, pinched Kard's legs, held them perpendicular from the knees down. Kard's rushing weight carried his body on over. His knees popped. He screamed and fell moaning on the mat.

Sog-chafka was already rushing and he tried to duck as Smith lunged upward. The sound in the room was cracking and sharp. Sog-chafka, the instructor in Wortan fighting, stumbled back and his thick arms dug at the air and a laxness showed under the skin-tight black uniform. Blood ran on the mats as Sog-chafka refused to go down any further than his knees. His head hung loosely and he slowly raised his blood-shot eyes.

His massive face twisted. Kard of Shilon lay groaning a little, nursing dislocated knees.

Sog-chafka remained bent, powerful thighs driving as his toes dug into the mat in a pounding, hurtling running dive, head down, hands reaching. It was a ferocious thing to see. Smith could hear the gasps of anticipation as he waited.

SMITH chopped down with cupped hands as he stepped aside. He brought his knee up into Sog-chafka's face and the instructor spun crazily across the mat, his body sinking lower and lower and finally sliding forward on his belly and lying there without moving at all. "Brute strength," Smith said, "is what you want on Wortan."

Smith glanced at Geria. "As you said earlier, Geria, there's something glorious about fighting tooth and nail. That's what you said."

Smith's foot was jerked from under him as Kard heaved. Smith's heavy body thudded on the mat. Before he could twist around,

Kard's powerful arm was around his throat. Smith's wind was cut off. He felt his eyes bulge, and he knew that Kard would kill him. "I think Earthsmith, it only right you should come down here with me!"

Smith put his right hand under Kard's right elbow. He clenched Kard's right wrist with the other hand. He pushed up with his right hand, heaved down with his left. Kard screamed a second time as his elbow popped.

He had to let go or his arm would break, so he let go. As Kard rolled free, Smith aimed for that vital point just to the left of the tip of Kard's chin. The back of Kard's head thudded on the mat, his eyes rolled up.

Smith got to his feet. He could hear Jorak of Gyra yelling. "He used psi! He used psi!"

Smith hated to acquire another headache, but he felt this had to be done. He concentrated on Jorak who started to sweat. Then Jorak came down to the mats and began to writhe and hop around in a weird and formless dance. Round and round the mats Jorak danced, his face working fitfully.

Sog-chafka was on one knee. His face was swelling and blood ran from his chin. He grinned and a broken tooth fell out. He looked up at the row of spectators. "He didn't use any psi on me. I guess you could say it wasn't necessary."

There was no applause from the spectators. There was a kind of

bitter ferment working, a wonderment and a suspicion and a dull kind of shock that blanks out facing unpleasant truths.

Smith started past the first row, then stopped and looked down at the woman. He'd miss her, she had seen to that, and she had only been jesting. He'd think of how it might have been, at another time, in another way—but he'd forget in time. You forgot and you grew. Especially, when you had a job to do.

"There's one thing this school has," he said, "that Earth doesn't have . . . and never did . . . and probably never will. And that is Geria of Bortinot."

When he went out, she was staring after him with an odd expression he couldn't identify. And behind her, Jorak of Gyra danced round and round the mats.

THE Registrar's lights blinked, with what might almost have been nervousness.

"Smith of Earth. Item: Garnot of Jlob has withdrawn his recommendation that you leave the school. However, his transtellar history class will have a new instructor for a week. His name is Khrom of Khaldmar.

"Item: Sog-chafka of Wortan withdraws his accusation that you used psi-power in Wortan fighting. Wortan fighting classes have been dropped for two weeks.

"Item: Kard of Shilon does not wish to meet you again in Wortan.

"Item: Jorak of Gyra and Geria of

Bortinot do not question your mentality and formally request that you release Jorak from psi-power suggestion which is causing Jorak to dance himself to death."

Smith listened rather absently and then went to the window and looked out over the strange landscape.

"Smith of Earth . . . as yet you have not taken the battery of tests here, and the tests will determine your stay here. The choice is yours. We can request your withdrawal from the school, or we can keep you here. Your Dominant classification has been thoroughly validated. We are sure you would be happy here, and the tests will be presented in such a way that you will . . ."

Well, he hadn't let himself down. He'd defended his integrity as a human being. But he'd been told not to let Earth down.

Well, would he be letting Earth down by leaving? Would he be? If he returned and said that the galaxy had a school but we'd better not send students because the school is decadent—could Earth stand up in the face of its pricked bubble?

What is, and what is not, letting your planet down? Smith knew it for an almost meaningless phrase, standing here before the clicking Registrar. The important thing was to learn, for from learning, are sowed the seeds of progress, and surely he had learned.

Yes, he had learned a great deal about the Galactic culture.

The Registrar's voice droned on, being very logical and again petulant in a feminine way. It was a compliant machine. It got along well, maintaining a nice balance, with everyone. With Dominants it became slightly recessive. With Receptives, it was just a little bit Dominant.

He watched the monstrous blotch of the red star, swelling and crimson, old and fading, yet filling a quarter of the sky, like a fat old man, getting fatter while his brain rotted away in his skull:

He turned as the door opened. His breath shortened as she came toward him. Smith rubbed his bald pate, and felt the heat rise to his face.

"You made a fool of me, Smith," she whispered. "Now you're blushing . . . and that's just an act isn't it? You're still making a fool of me."

"No," he said. "The way I felt about you and the things I said, I meant them. I still do."

"But you let me use that psi-power on you . . . and . . . and if you'd wanted to . . . you could have . . ." He stared. She was sobbing a little.

He had felt it before, but the feeling was strong enough now to motivate action. He put his arms about her, protectively. He looked out the window at the cragged horizon and the dying red star behind.

"The psi-power," he said. "I didn't realize I had it then. When you used it . . . and later, the dream-

empathy, it stirred up a lot of old capacities. I wasn't trying to fool anyone. I love you, Geria of Bor-tinot. And I'm not fooling . . ."

"Your decision, Smith of Earth . . ."

Well, he had learned a great deal about Galactic culture, so what should he do? A duty to Earth, to civilization. He had learned:

. . . That the superior cultures out here among the stars were a myth.

. . . That something had gone hay-wire in the startrails, that everyone you met was either psychotic or highly neurotic by Earth standards.

. . . That the exceptions might be the hope of the Galaxy. But they were very few.

. . . That Earth had better seek out the reasons for all this, try to eliminate them at their sources if possible, but certainly keep them from contaminating the home planet.

. . . That Earth had a big job, but if he came back and reported and worked at it, he might convince Earth she was up to it.

That was one way.

"Your decision, Smith of Earth, the battery of tests or . . ."

She was looking up at him. "Well?"

"What do you think, Geria?"

She put her face against his chest. "Whatever you decide," she whispered. "You're the Dominant . . ."

He smiled at the banks of lights. "When's the next ship for Deneb?" he asked. "We're going back to Earth."

☆ Fantasy Vs. Fact? ☆

THE fact that science fiction has grown up can be recognized from many sources. The movies, radio, TV and the "slick" magazines have all presented it in one form or another and all have been favorably impressed by the surprising response. Perhaps even more of a mark of its coming of age, is evidence of the serious way in which scholars are treating it. It is not at all uncommon to discover frequently Master's and Doctoral theses are written around the effects and influence of this relatively new literary medium.

Recently, a very serious study of science fiction was made by Professor Macabe of the University of Edinburgh. One would hardly expect the field to be the object of such a survey, but it was—and most interesting, indeed!

Macabe, after presenting the usual historical resume of the history of science fiction, going all the way back to the earliest Greek conceptions, presented an interesting point of view regarding the status of the modern field. Macabe's thesis is that modern science fiction can be broken down into two specific fields, fantasy and fact, fields which overlap and are complementary but which can definitely be distinguished.

The reasonable and acute judgment is reflected in most of today's output. On one hand there is the s-f story whose matrix is fact and extrapolated science, very often a story of gadgetry, while on the other hand there is the type of fantasy whose roots recognize no scientific

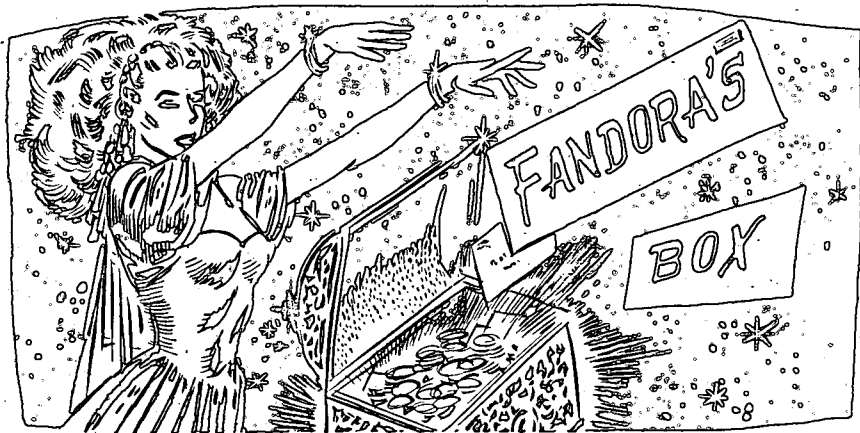
limitations. And in between these defined areas are varying distinctions.

For example the immortal Burroughs novels constitute a most famous example of the latter type, along with such modern creations as "Tof-fee", de Camp's work, etc. At the opposite pole are the works of the English writer A. C. Clarke, whose stories are utterly authentic depictions of what science will some day do. In this category falls the works of Heinlein and some others.

Between these two extremes fall the majority of s-f stories, all three classifications offering a reader a great measure of satisfaction depending upon his inclination. Frequently it is maintained that you get out of science fiction what you put into it, but this seems to be erroneous since the ultimate end of most reading is pleasure. And you can't classify *that* easily.

Fantasy and fact then don't exist in mutually contradictory terms. You may like one or the other—or both—or you may like them blended. And from a writer's standpoint it is probably this latter which is the most difficult to do.

Because s-f is unfamiliar to many, Macabe notes, a beginning reader is generally attracted by fantasy and then as his familiarity with the strange world of s-f mounts, he drifts into the more scientific. He qualifies this observation however with the remark that a good story still remains a good story—fact or fiction!



Conducted by Mari Wolf

THERE'S a letter from Dave Hammond in the Box this time that starts off: "I see that you've been making exclamations about the glories of the LASFS (Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society). That's partiality. You have not heard of the Philadelphia Science Fiction Society apparently. We have a motto at the PSFS: 'If you have never been a member of the PSFS it doesn't matter what you belong to. If you are, you won't even be interested in any others.'"

I'll come back to Dave and the PSFS later on. But first I want to say that I see his point. The trouble is, I can review fanzines easily enough and tell you what's in a certain issue and what's likely to appeal to you. That's easy. The fanzines are right here for me to read. But I can't very well review a club I've never visited, especially if it's one whose members I don't know. So, when I reviewed LASFS as a typical stf club in an effort to show you what fun fans can have when they get together, I chose LASFS for one principal reason. I've been

there. I've attended its meetings. I know something about it.

I'd like to know about a lot of other clubs too, in all parts of the country. And I'm sure you readers would be interested in finding out about clubs in your vicinity. But since I can't very well wander around the country visiting all the science fiction clubs (though it would be a lot of fun, at that) I'll have to ask the clubs themselves for help on the matter.

If you belong to a stf club, anywhere, why not write in and tell me and the readers of Madge about it? If one of your members would write a letter telling about the club, its activities, its projects, how it was formed—anything of interest to others who might want to contact you or form similar clubs elsewhere—I'll be glad to print it. You'll be publicizing your club and doing IMAGINATION'S readers a favor too—because who knows how many stf enthusiasts there are in your neighborhood who'd be only too glad of an opportunity to get in touch with you? And it would be fun hearing

from fans all over the country, and in other countries too. So how about it? And oh yes, please type your letters, double-spaced, on one side of the paper, only; that way I won't have to retype them.

Now back to Dave Hammond and the PSFS—though I challenge his statement that if you're a Philadelphia member you won't be interested in any other clubs. *That's* partiality too, Dave . . .

"Allow me to introduce us as the oldest science fiction club with a continuous existence up to the present day. We started early in 1935. First year fans included Milt Rothman, Bob Madle, Jack Agnew, Guy Kendtor, and Ozzie Train—who are still with us. And they've carved out a bit of a niche for themselves. Milt was one of the top fans and he's also an author under the pseudonym of Lee Gregor. Bob Madle was an officer of the now defunct Science Fiction League. Bob and Agnew are the New Era publishers who have printed Keller's *Solitary Hunters* & *the Abyss* in book form. Guy Kendtor was a high ranking fan. Ozzie Train has the largest collection of Rider Haggard in existence, was helpful in compiling the Checklist, is one of the advisers for Polaris library selections, and is one half of Prime Press; responsible for putting the classic *Blind Spot* into book form.

"Discussing the later members to join the group would be rather tiresome. We'll just say that one of science fiction's leading humorists, L. Sprague de Camp, is a member. Alan E. Nourse, an up-and-coming new author, recently joined—watch his work, too: he's appeared in IMAGINATION and sold to aSF, OW, Startling, F & S-F, IF, etc. You'll see a lot of him. Lex Phillips, who did a good deal of writing back in the forties, is a member, as is Hal

Lynch, who recently sold his first story to F & S-F. Then there is—but by now you have gotten the idea. We are a club. The best, too.

"I seem to see an error in your writings. 'He (Forrest Ackerman) was one of the founding members of the old Science Fiction League, as the club was called then.' Not exactly right, the club wasn't called the Science Fiction League. The LASFS was a part of the League: just as a square is a rectangle, but a rectangle is not necessarily a square. Back in the 30's, Wonder Stories started the Science Fiction League, with cards, membership buttons, etc. Then the old Wonder gave small groups of fans the right to become chapters of the League.

"If you want to talk about top writers passing through the club consider these: Jack Williamson, George O. Smith (who until recently was an active member), Ted Sturgeon, Bradbury, Tucker, Willy Ley, etc. Editors like Bixby, Evelyn Gold, Mary Gnaedinger, etc. Then artists like Sol Levin and Russ Swanson who have done several dust jackets.

"I, too, being a junior sort of member (I'm the only one that can't vote), have heard considerable about the good old days. I've heard of the feuds, the conferences, etc.

"And those old days had a wealth of fanzines. Madle has been showing me fanzines back in the days when they were not satisfied with publishing just one. He and Jack Agnew had a whole string of them.

"Even these 'degenerate' days have plenty of activity. Besides the meeting nights, we hold, weekly, little meetings when about 7 or 8 of us get together at Madle's. This little offshoot of the PSFS is rather interesting. The name of it is tentatively the Fanta-Science Literary

Society. It is fabulous for its anarchistic policies: no certain members, no official time, no minutes, no officers, no business, and no program. The only dues are for beer!

"I guess that I have raved on long enough. I just wanted to show you that there are more things in heaven and earth, but more happens at the Philadelphia Science Fiction Society.

"Not to be impertinent, ma'am, but—for the sake of equality—you could even the ledger and tell your readers of the PSFS. You could. You could. *Couldn't you?*"

"Best regards, Dave Hammond—Secretary, Philadelphia Science Fiction Society." Dave's address: 806 Oak St., Runnemeade, N. J.

BACK to the Los Angeles area again, there's another group of young fans who have recently started up activities in the San Fernando Valley. They're the Spacewarppers, and they've put out a new fanzine called the Spacewarper which I'll review later on in the Box. We went to one of their meetings a while ago—it was really a combination meeting and party, with the Forrest Ackermans, S. J. Byrnes, Rog and myself all gathered there and the first issue of the zine right off the press.

It was really a wonderful meeting, once we got there. Rog and I had a little trouble, as we had copied the address down wrong and found that what we thought was to be our destination was really the middle of a cornpatch, but luckily we finally arrived at Encino and Charles Neutzel's place. It was a very informal get-together, just friendly visiting and discussion of science fiction, topped off by the most wonderful cake I've seen—iced in a science fiction motif!

It was the sort of evening where without programming or formality everyone has a lot of fun, and if any of you stf fans in the Valley don't know about the Spacewarppers, you're missing something! As to what you're missing, you can get more information from Charles Neutzel, 16452 Moorpark St., Encino, Calif.

Also in the Box this time there's a letter from Bobby Gene Warner, vice-president of the Texas Fan Club. He'd like to hear from you Texas fans and get more members for the club, and new members will really get a lot for their membership too. But I'll let Bobby tell you about the group himself . . .

"The future of the Texas Fan Club looks pretty dim at present. I have been sitting here almost all afternoon writing to prospective members and hoping that at least one or two of them would show some response.

"And while pausing for breath I thought that, perhaps more Texas Fan could be contacted through your column. So, here I am, asking for a little help.

"There isn't much definite information about the club at present. There have been several officers appointed: R. J. Banks, Jr., President, and myself, Vice-president. There was one other officer, but he doesn't seem too enthusiastic about having a Texas Fan Club.

"The following information is only tentative:

(1) Dues will probably be about \$50 per annum.

(2) Members of the club will get Banks' fanzines Utopian and Program Parade at a special subscription price when the club is *actually* a club. (We hope.)

(3) I shall quote a few paragraphs from one of Banks' recent

letters: 'Texans join the club through Utopian; are assigned a club number; receive the mag free while their club dues are paid up; the club has no benefits except this and a Texas FANews Section (limit two pages) in each Utopian. Dues are 50c yearly (which will just about cover the cost of mailing the members quarterly Utopians and 8 supplementary separate publications of Promag Parade, on the months when Utopian is not published. When membership under the above scheme reaches 25 (about all the free Utopians I can spare), the club will be separated from Utopian; the club-news section will be published separately; officers will be elected; general club activity will begin.' He goes on to say that, after a time, Utopian and Promag Parade will be offered at a special price of 75c per annum for members of the Club. And that is about all that I know about the Club. About all, in fact, anyone knows about it.

"We need backing. We hope that you will help us through your column in IMAGINATION. We assure you that any such help will be firmly appreciated by the ones of us who are in earnest about building a lasting Fan Club in Texas."

All you Texas fans can reach Bobby Gene Warner at P. O. Box 63, Bessmay, Texas. Knowing Texans, I'm sure you'll have a terrific club.

And all you other fan clubs everywhere, whether you have a long established group or just a beginning one, or maybe just the desire to start one—write in and give the details. How about it?

Now to the fanzines.

* * *

ETRON: 25c; bimonthly; Chuck Taylor, 1521 Mars, Lakewood 7, Ohio. When I picked up Etron and looked at its cover and format, both

most professional looking, I thought, "Well, here's one I've never seen before nor heard of," and I wondered why . . . Then I opened it and found to my surprise that it was the first issue. I read the contents of this new mimeoed zine and I was even more surprised. Editor Jim Schreiber and staff are going to go a long way to improve on this one.

Etron is published by the Extra-Terrestrial Research Organization, but aside from Mars being in Ohio most of the staff seems centered on Earth. There are members in France as well as in the US and Canada, and page 6 of this issue is written in French, for these members. Luckily I dug up my French dictionary, so I can truthfully say I read every word in the issue!

It's hard to pick out anything to especially recommend. The fiction was all well written and interesting, with perhaps Ho Braden's "Laughter" having the edge in its stylistic presentation of an unusual theme. There are some articles dealing with straight science — Robert Bartlett, Jr.'s, "An Analysis of Soviet Radio Propaganda" especially gives a concise, over-all view of that medium, and Bob Evans, Jr. gives some background data on the hydrogen bomb in his "H Bomb Theory."

All in all, if you'd like a really good, well-rounded, and representative fanzine, I'm sure you'll like Etron as much as I did.

* * *

TLMA: 25c; bimonthly; Lynn Hickman, 408 W. Bell St., Statesville, North Carolina. As usual, The Little Monsters of America have some excellent material in their zine. Ronald Clyne's cover, a scene called "Family Album," shows a typical weird-fantasy family group, ghouls, horns, fangs, and all, and is really impressive. As for the stories, Alex-

ander Griffith's "Only a Mother" is a short-short of the kind that I, at least, am always pleasantly surprised to run across in the prozines.

Ian Macauley has a guest editorial on how to attract the causal reader of science fiction into fandom. Highly amusing, but don't follow his method or you will also end in a padded cell.

And TLMA now has a new co-editor, the new Mrs. Hickman. Congratulations, and may all your children be Little Monsters too!

* * *

OOPSLA!: 10c; published every six weeks; Gregg Calkins, 761 Oakley St., Salt Lake City 16, Utah. There are always good articles and regular features in this mimeoed zine. In this issue Wilkie Conner, in his featured Konner's Kolum, discusses fan clubs. He discusses two large and active organizations—the NFFF, or National Fantasy Fan Federation, and The Little Monsters of America, reviewed above. And he brings up the point that one of the principal activities of fandom is interesting young fans in writing and thus keeping a new crop of future stf writers coming along all the time. He's right, too. It's fascinating reading the early works of fan writers and wondering which of them will keep writing and become the stf big names of tomorrow.

Other features are Shelby Vick's letter story, "Dear Alice," and Walter Willis on nominating conventions—fan, that is, not political.

* * *

FANTASY TIMES: 10c; twice a month; James V. Taurasi, 137-03 32nd. Ave., Flushing 54, New York. Here's where you'll find all the news in the science fiction world, complete and up to date. There's not only coverage of the professional publishing field but also news of fans, ex-fans, and anyone connected

with the fantasy field. You'll find a lot of items you might have overlooked in the regular newspapers. For example, did you know that an LASFS member was an undercover agent for the FBI? Fantasy Times correspondent Arthur Jean Cox reported this news a while ago, bringing out the fact that one of the witnesses at the West Coast trial of eleven communists was also an ex-fan, Samuel Russel. The testimony brought out that fans have no interest in politics . . .

For all the news in the stf field, read Fantasy Times.

* * *

FAN-FARE: 15c; bimonthly; W. Paul Ganley, 119 Ward Road, North Tonawanda, New York. Fan-Fare really lives up to its subtitle, "The Fiction Fanzine." You'll always find some of the best fan stories in the field between its covers. And some excellent verse also.

In this issue Andrew Duane's "Dread Huntress" is a powerful fantasy based on a legend of a Moon that hunts and kills. Actually it's the writing more than the story that brings the legend alive and makes you feel the mood of the hunter and the Huntress.

Also gripping, and written in quite a different style, is Walt Klein's "To Be A God," also with a mythological base.

For fantasy stories and fantasy verse by the Duanes, Andrew and Toby, as well as by many others, you can't do better than read Fan-Fare.

* * *

PEON: 10c; published irregularly; Charles Lee Riddle, 109 Dunham St., Norwich, Connecticut. In the issue I have here Dave Mason runs a thought-provoking article, "Politics and Stf, or The Robot and the Komisar." He points out that the majority of the stories in the field

find their basis in a similar ideology, and that fans themselves, despite their general refusal to discuss politics, share a similar set of political beliefs. On reading the article my first reaction was a loud "Tain't so," and a mustering up of dozens of stories that prove it ain't—but lo and behold, under most of the varied future technologies and sociologies similar basics do appear . . .

Anyway, it's the kind of article that could give a writer an idea for a story or two.

There's lots more, including T. E. Watkins' discussion of fan hoaxes and publicity stunts, and Joe Hensley's rather sad little tale, "Fish Story." And Peon's price, as you'll note, is down to 10c again. It's more than worth it.

* * *

STARLANES: 10c; Orma McCormick, 1558 W. Hazelhurst St., Ferndale 20, Michigan. Starlanes is principally a poetry fanzine, with fantasy verse by many of the specialists in that field. There's Lilith Lorraine's "Cosmic Casanovas" and Robert Briney's "Atlantis," but the verse I got the biggest kick out of (and it's hardly a serious verse, more the rib-tickling variety) is Garth Bentley's "Lament of the Science Fiction Cover Girl." To quote just one couplet, "It may detract from my glamour act, but once in my life-long span, Let me shriek or shrink in a coat of mink instead of a coat of tan."

Poor underclad cover gals!

* * *

VANATIONS: bimonthly; Norman G. Browne, 13906 - 101a Ave., Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. This is the first issue of a fanzine with a most unusual policy. It has no set price. You pay for it after you read it—whatever you think it's worth.

Norman Browne says he started this policy because so many fanzines

start out well, worth more than their subscription price, but after the reader has subscribed the quality may drop and he doesn't get his money's worth in reading enjoyment. This way, if the reader thinks Vanations is worth a quarter he'll send a quarter; if he thinks it worth a dime he'll send a dime.

The first issue has a very good cover, humorous contents featuring parodies of letters to the editor's columns, and a screamingly funny advice to the lovelorn column, Borothy Bix. Also Alistair Cameron writes a serious, and, to an American reader, startling account of fantasy censorship in Canada.

Why not request a copy? Then *you* decide how good it is. I'm sure you'll find it enjoyable. I know I did.

* * *

DARK UNIVERSE: 10c; Dave Van Arnham, 1740-34th. Ave. N., St. Petersburg, Florida. Here's another new fanzine, put out by "The St. Petersburg Interplanetary Society, a new club of St. Pete Senior High School—we hope."

In addition to Interplanetary, which is strictly a high school club, Dave Van Arnham is president of another Florida club which hopes to become statewide. This is called Infinity, and its dues of \$1.00 a year will include a 12 issue subscription to this zine, plus any other benefits they can cook up. So all you Florida fans who're interested write to Dave Van Arnham for more details. And while you're at it, get a copy of Dark Universe.

* * *

THE SPACEWARPERS: 25c; quarterly; Charles Nuetzel, 16452 Moorpark St., Encino, Calif. Here's another first issue, put out by the Spacewarpers Club I mentioned earlier.

The cover of this issue is really

unusual. It's the picture of a planet, Mars probably from the red color, and it's reproduced against a black, star-spattered background. This color illo was done by the silk screen process by Charles Nuetzel.

And Stephen Szold's "Contest Story," which has no title, is an interesting example of the alien defeated by his own over-confidence. The contest part of the story is that the reader who selects the best title for it wins a two year subscription to the zine.

Keep up those covers. They're really unusual.

* * *

TYRANN: 10c; bimonthly; Norbert Hirschhorn, 853 Riverside Drive, New York 32, N. Y. In the issue I have here of this hectographed zine Paul Ganley writes an interesting take-off on the vampire theme. It's called "Bloody Mess," and is written strictly from the vampirian point of view.

Also Orville Mosher has an article entitled "How to Form a Science-Fiction Club." This article publicizes the booklet that he, Shelby Vick, and Nan Gerding are writing on the subject. In the last issue of MADGE I gave more information about this project, which should certainly be of help to fans, especially new fans everywhere. If you're interested, write to Orville Mosher at 1728 Mayfair, Emporia, Kansas for more details.

And better still, send a dime to Tyrann and read all about it.

* * *

THE BULLETIN OF THE CLEVELAND SCIENCE FICTION SOCIETY: 15c; monthly; Harlan Ellison, 12701 Shaker Blvd., Apt. 616, Cleveland 20, Ohio.

In the editorial of this issue Harlan says that the Bulletin is *not* slanted toward any group of fans, not even toward any fans at all.

It's written "primarily for the folks outside the science fiction field who wonder just what's on the inside of the goldfish bowl, so to speak."

And in this issue too there's a wonderful satire on the contents of fandom's goldfish bowl. It's Stephen Schultheis' "The Frightening Fable of Huburtus Snoggle, Stfan," and it's all about what happens to new fan Huburtus when he attends his first club meeting—and finds that everyone discusses everything *but* science fiction!

The satire's really laugh provoking. And so is the rest of the issue too. Those Cleveland fans must really have a lot of fun.

* * *

NEWSSCOPE: 5c; monthly; Lawrence R. Campbell, 43 Tremont St., Malden 48, Mass. Here's the nickel newszine that gives you a lot of information about fan activities in the US and other countries. This issue has an Australian news column by Graham Stone. Also you'll find book, magazine, radio, TV, and movie news and reports.

A chatty mimeographed newszine for only half a dime.

* * *

STF-TRADER: 10c; bimonthly; K. Martin Carlson, 1028 Third Ave. So., Moorhead, Minnesota. The Trader is strictly for collectors—those who wish to buy, sell, or swap stf magazines or books. If you're interested in starting a collection, adding to one, or disposing of one, here's a good medium to deal through.

* * *

FANTASY CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM: \$1.00; Alistair Cameron; published by Chester D. Cuthbert, 54 Ellesmere Av., St. Vital, Manitoba, Canada.

This isn't a fanzine. Nor is it recommended to the non-fan, casual stf reader. But this publication of the Canadian Science Fiction Asso-

ciation is a very important one for all those who collect science fiction and fantasy or who are interested in seriously studying and classifying the field. Alistair Cameron has really done an exhaustive job of setting up this decimal-type classification system whereby a given work can be indexed according to its basic ideas and themes—the philosophy, pure science, art, etc. from which the story springs.

The edition is strictly limited to 500 numbered copies, so you collec-

tors had better send for yours right away. As a reference work for the serious collector, it's well worth a dollar.

* * *

Well, that's all for now. Remember to write in and tell MADGE'S readers about *your* club and its doings. And keep those fanzines coming to me, Mari Wolf, FANDORA'S BOX, IMAGINATION, P. O. Box 230, Evanston, Illinois. See you next month!

—Mari Wolf

INTRODUCING The Author



Robert Donald Locke



(Concluded from Page 2)

discovering my name in the index of Dave Dexter's definitive book on jazz.

Three years in the Air Force helped the war interval drag by.

Came the readjustment era. I picked up some sf mags at random and discovered to my happy surprise that science fiction had progressed, matured, developed a new depth and polish. Many of the yarns I read filled me with a dazzled sense of wonder; others soared into a realm of cosmic speculation that left me far behind.

Groaning at my own inadequacies, I purchased a typewriter and concentrated on hammering out whodunits under a pseudonym. It took three more years, some graduate education and the encourage-

ment of Forry Ackerman to make me dare tackle science fiction. It's a difficult field—but I love it!

Like all writers, I'm a great fan—although I've penned only one epistle in my life, a four-page eulogy of Robert E. Howard that Farnsworth Wright printed intact. Phrase for phrase, I think Bob Howard was the most talented writer of his time and eventually would have created historical epics to outdash Costain and out-sex Spillane.

I have a wanderlust about ten times as big as my income—and when I'm not writing, I'm always bent for strange ports of call. My one ambition is to live long enough to soak my ankles in moon pumice!

—Robert Donald Locke

etters from the eaders

TIRED ... OF THE BEST!

Dear Ed:

Doggone it, Bill Hamling, I'm getting tired of you putting out the best magazine in the science fiction field! In the January 1952 issue it was SPECIAL DELIVERY; it was REBIRTH in the March number; and getting more up to date in the October issue it was ARMAGEDDON 1970! That story was the best piece of stf I've read in a long time.

WANDERLUST in the October issue was also a top story. That ending really floored me.

As an aside to interested readers, I have 46 ASF's to trade for back issues of Madge and Other Worlds. Also, I'd like to hear from any fans in the Wichita area.

J. L. Winters
4592 Juniper
Wichita, Kansas

Darn it all, J. L., we're just going to have to continue making you tired—with coming issues! As to back numbers of Madge you'll find an announcement and handy coupon in this issue to fill your needs. You can, incidentally, have any back issues included as part of a subscription. Which reminds us, there's a terrific Xmas offer on page 162—don't miss

it with

A TERRIFIC COVER

Dear Ed:

Yesterday I went down to the local newsstand to see if any new stf magazines were out. The first thing to hit my eye was the October issue of Madge. Man, what a cover! I can truly say that all the time I've been a science fiction reader that is the best cover I've ever seen. Man—it was outstanding! If the issue would have cost \$1.00 I would have bought it. I haven't started to read the stories yet but I just had to let you know how much I liked Bill Terry's atom bomb—flying saucer cover.

One other important thing (to me at any rate) is the fact that when I buy Madge I don't have to look at the contents page because I know through experience that it's the best my money can buy for science fiction entertainment.

Myron Ferreira
167 Hudson St.
Hackensack, N. J.

Bill Terry is really turning into quite a popular cover artist. You'll be seeing him again next month with another terrific cover. And the lead

novel will be by Kris Neville. Remember the last time they teamed up—with SPECIAL DELIVERY.? Well watch for EARTH ALERT! . . . wth

CUSACK, EN GARDE!

Dear Bill:

In the July '52 issue I absorbed Peter Cusack's drivel without rebuttal; the "point" he tried to make was ridiculous, not deserving of an answer. But now I see this rolling stonehead is gathering Hansons (re the October issue letter section) so beware, dragon, St. George is oiling the lance to defend fair fandom!

I quote Cusack: "I think this over emphasis on fandom loses Madge more sales than it gains." To the contrary, I KNOW it gains fans—directly and indirectly. For example: I became a fan directly through reading letters and fan columns. However, science fiction gained FIVE new readers; because of my interest and enthusiasm, four friends became readers. Not fans, remember, readers. Now one of these has reached the point where reading is not enough. I give him one more year before he succumbs to the lure of active science fiction fandom. Realizing, of course, that one example is not necessarily indicative, I have contacted many other fans and they all tell me the same thing.

I note also that Cusack is a freshman at Cornell. I'd like to point out to him that a majority of active fans are college students. & .

Incidentally, I have a peeve about the letter section—use Mrs. if the writer is a married gal. Why? I was intrigued by the name Sherry Payne Kohler in the October issue. What a delicious name! Here, I thought, is a beautiful redhead who'll make a nice correspondent. Her first few remarks didn't change

this opinion. Then came the revelation: "My husband," she says . . .

Roses to you, Bill, for defending RAP. He is certainly one of the finest fellows in the business. I've never met him but his personality is stamped on every page of OW. Especially his editorials. Guts? The word was invented for Ray Palmer.

Roses also for Madge!

Jack Gath
42 Oakland Ave.
Uniontown, Pa.

Simply, because a gal is married is no reason why she might not like to carry on science fiction correspondence . . . or was there something else you had in mind, Jack Old Rip? . . . Speaking of RAP, the high spot of the recent World Science Fiction Convention (for us at any rate) was the privilege of presenting to Ray Palmer a bronze plaque commemorating his many contributions to science fiction through the years. A wonderful tribute to an even more wonderful guy wth

SOMETHING MISSING . . .

Dear Ed:

This magazine called Madge: Now I believe this is a very good publication. Certainly it is after printing such novels as TONIGHT THE SKY WILL FALL and ARMAGEDDON 1970. In regard to the latter story, featured in the October issue, never have I read in fact or fiction a more menacing description of the flying saucers! The illustrations were good too . . .

However, when I finished reading the story I felt as if something were missing. I can't say exactly what, but something . . . All the other stories were fine too, except "Hey, Ma, Where's Willie?" This was a waste of space.

Mr. Alan Davis (letter section Oc-

tober issue) I challenge you to a duel! How dare you insult the integrity and honor of such a fine young lady as our TOFFEE!

I take leave to polish my armor and see to my seconds . . .

Ray Thompson
410 South 4th St.
Norfolk, Neb.

That "something missing" can only be one thing, Ray: a sequel. How about it, fans, want St. Reynard to write one? with

PASS THE MARTINIS . . .

Dear Bill:

What do I think of Madge? A bit of verse popped into my mind to illustrate:

A bunch of the boys were whooping it up,

Out where Saturn has rings galore

There was Gold and Palmer and Hamling

And John Campbell, Jr. made four;

Then out of the methane and hydrogen fog and into the dim and the glare

There stepped Joe Fan shouting thunderously—

"Madge is best — anytime, anywhere!"

And after reading your editorial in the September issue the following came to life:

I never saw a three-eyed BEM

I never hope to see one—

But after that last martini, dad

I think I am going to be one!

Dick Anderson
4552 51st Ave. N.E.
Seattle 5, Wash.

To say your verse is classic, or really very new

Would be an overstatement, but

We like it!—

And what you say is true! . . . with

TIMELY ISSUE!

Dear Ed:

Although I've been reading your—I should say my—magazine since September 1951, thus far I haven't let you know how much I enjoy it. I was a fan of *Fantastic Adventures* while you were the editor there so when you brought out Madge I tagged along.

I consider the October issue of Madge to be on a par with almost any issue so far. I enjoyed every story more or less and the novel especially was very timely as the flying saucers are featured in the papers daily here in New York. Personally, I think that PATROL was the top story in the issue with the others following closely. I hope to see more of this new writer, Richard H. Nelson.

Looking back on the great yarn, TONIGHT THE SKY WILL FALL I believe that the general impression is that TTSWF used a new concept. You helped further that impression although you of all people should remember THE MAN WHO LAUGHED AT TIME which appeared in FA. I think that the credit for the idea should be given to whom it is due. Could anyone tell me the name of the author as that was the first science-fiction story I ever read.

Al Chmela
46-47 159th St.
Flushing 58, N.Y.

THE MAN WHO LAUGHED AT TIME was written by yours truly, Al. However, we don't intend to take credit for the basic idea you speak of. We can remember back in the early thirties the old WONDER STORIES ran a short-short by A. Connell called, DREAM'S END which used the same idea. For all we know there are probably many others with the same idea prior to

that story. We feel, and we're sure you'll agree, that it is not the idea that makes a story—it is the manner in which it is used. It is the individual author's treatment of a given theme that makes a story good. Let's face the fact that in science fiction there just aren't any new ideas—only fresh treatments. We think, as you and the rest of our readers, that Dan Galouye's TTSWF was unique, not because the idea was new, but because of the way the author handled it . . . wh

FOUR POINT PROGRAM

Dear Mr. Hamling:

I am against serials.

I like IMAGINATION.

I do not like many of the letters you print in the reader section.

The editorials and FANDORA'S BOX are exceptionally interesting.

I could hardly contain myself any longer after reading Madge for over a year. Hence, the above remarks.

In regard to my gripe on some of the letters, my chief complaint is that the letter writers too often fail to explain themselves. They are content to rely upon such super-sensationalistic adjectives as "terrific" and "colossal". What they need is more objectivity and literary analysis.

An SOS to any fans who can help and would care to supply the information via the mails: 1, What is the Great Shaver Mystery and what did the ensuing controversy involve? 2, What is Dianetics, who is L. Ron Hubbard, and what did the controversy involve?

For many years I have been harboring the suspicion that most writers were really Ray Bradbury in disguise. After reading the October issue of Madge I have finally strong grounds for this suspicion. I am referring to PATROL by Richard

H. Nelson. Read that story again at all costs! I would be willing to bet my bottom dollar that PATROL was really written by Bradbury . . .

Well? . . . If not, I would certainly like to see more of this Richard H. Nelson . . .

Peter Rank
2005 Prospect St.
La Crosse, Wisc.

You just lost your bottom dollar, Pete. Richard H. Nelson is not a pen-name. PATROL was Dick's first sale in the science fiction field, although he has sold westerns and detective stories. You'll be seeing more of him we're sure . . . wh

PROPHETIC NOVEL? . . .

Dear Mr. Hamling:

I just finished reading ARMA-GEDDON 1970 in the October Madge—which I thoroughly enjoyed. I then went out and bought an evening paper and what should I find on the front page but a story about a man being "attacked" by a flying saucer. The place where it happened isn't very far from here. After reading the paper I realized how prophetic Geoff St. Reynard's novel might be after all!

In a recent issue of LOOK, questions were asked Dr. Donald Menzel, about flying saucers. He said he felt they were something—but not interplanetary or interstellar ships. He also said, "If they've got space ships, they've got radio. If they've got radio they would have communicated with us. And if interplanetary travelers came here they'd get off their ships and have a look at us."

If they've been over Korea—which they undoubtedly have—that would be enough to scare the wits out of a peaceful person. How many people would make themselves known, if they be travelers, to a nervous, belligerent race?

. . . All Madge's stories in the October issue were tops. By the way, I'm looking forward to more Daniel Galouye and Charles Myers stories.

IMAGINATION is one of my top favorites — and it will stay that way as long as you continue to publish top-notch fiction!

James Simmons
713 Langston Ct.
Orlando, Fla.

We think you've hit the core of the rebuttal to Dr. Menzel, Jim. The fact that a race might have "radio" does not establish that they must "contact" us—unless they want to. Similarly, they would not "leave" their space ships unless they felt it necessary to "mix" with us. The big thing here is motive. We're convinced (unlike Dr. Menzel) that the flying saucers are extra-terrestrial in origin. The "why" they're here is the unknown quantity—although it might be safe to say their appearances periodically support a "reconnaissance" theory . . . As to Charlie Myers and Dan Galouye, yes, you'll be seeing new stories by both of these talented writers shortly wth

AND HE JUST WROTE ONE . . .

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Although Madge's "Letters From the Readers" is well liked by yours truly, I doubt if I'll ever write a letter for you to publish. Not because Madge isn't good, since you, me and the rest of the readers know the magazine is at the top of the field of science fiction. Right now Madge and Astounding are the top two in my humble opinion. Don't ask me to decide which I favor more since I can't! I just feel I don't have much to say in a letter; matter of fact I'm surprised I've written this much.—Which probably

is a big tribute to Madge to make me sit down and try!

Thomas Christofer
129 Cocoa Ave.
Hershey, Pa.

Now that you've tried; Tom, let's hear from you again wth

FANS ON THE PAN

Dear Mr. Hamling:

I have been reading IMAGINATION since it first appeared on the stands over two years ago, so I figure I might as well add my two credit's worth in appreciation of an enjoyable publication.

The October 1952 issue, though not particularly monumental, was satisfying.

ARMAGEDDON 1970 impressed me strangely. Although the idea was ancient, the plot rather uninspiring, and the story itself of microscopic literary value, it was nevertheless enjoyable. I think the main thing that saved it was the characterization, which was really good.

WANDERLUST, not bad, though very obvious. SKIN GAME, different. "HEY MA, WHERE'S WIL-LIE?" negligible. PATROL — so far as I know an entirely new twist, and very well done. A high point in the issue. THE COSMIC BLUFF interplanetary jargon that left me cold.

It seems that you are having quite a discussion in the letter section concerning organized fandom. A Miss Hanson states that she believes things like this should be discussed somewhere in your magazine. So, realizing the combined curse of fandom will come prattling down upon me, I offer my candid views on the fan, plural: fen.

No doubt you receive many letters going something like this:

"Hi Willy:

"Zowieeeeeee! Here I am, back again to tell yuh what a great ish yuh brung out. I grabbed a copy at the ole corner newsstand, and had it finished before I got home. I'll see yuh in the eighth dimension. Zoocooooom!

Arthur "Spacewarp" Plotz
President, T.A.H.R.B.
(Third and Howard
Rocketeers' Band.)"

Sickening, isn't it. That about gives you my impression of organized fandom. It consists mostly of the type of hysterical young man with a high voice and a hopeless dream of becoming another shining literary light, and those strange people who deluge magazines with letters complaining about everything in general. Of course there is a liberal sprinkling of authors, and a few people of genuine intelligence and sincerity, who merely happen to like science fiction and also like those who like science fiction. But, for the most part I wouldn't have the average fan in my house. He would probably scare my cat!

When I read science fiction I read it for relaxation. Science fiction is not my God, as it appears to be the God of some of the more rabid fans. Sure, letters to the editor are fine. Even an occasional screwball one brightens up the atmosphere. But let's try to recognize the dividing line between a screwball and a moron, or just a person whose letters are annoying. Let the organized fans take the high road and the ordinary readers take the low road and although probably no one will get to Scotland, it will prevent a lot of friction.

By the way, the funniest part of your magazine this issue (October) was not in the stories, but in the letter column. I refer to a letter

on page 157 from Porter C. Redway. When I read the letter I got two hilarious mental pictures. The first is that of a prim little man turning crimson with shame as his scandalized eyes stare at the "horrible" blasphemy on page 28 of the July issue. The other shows the same prim man ordering a beautiful woman from his house in the glowing words: "Lips that utter helzandams will never touch mine! Begone, jade!" Thanks for a good laugh, Porter, old man . . .

Ben Jacopetti
1892 Green St.

San Francisco, Cal.

We don't intend to get in the middle in this "fandom" controversy—after all, somebody has to umpire! However, in all fairness we must state that organized fandom is not the "humatic fringe" you infer so baldly. Had you been at the 10th World Science Fiction Convention in Chicago over the Labor Day holidays, you would have seen more than a thousand fans from all over the world gathered for one purpose, to show their intense interest in science fiction. "Fen" rubbed shoulders with Nobel prize winners in science, laughed and talked with the country's leading science fiction personalities—and in general had a nice, mannerly, indeed brotherly, good time. It was an inspiring sight and made us proud to be connected with science fiction. As to the reader section in Madge, you will note that no one "group" monopolizes the section. Indeed, many letters are "firsts" and you wouldn't call these readers active fans—yet. We'll stick our necks out only this far—as long as fandom shows itself as wonderfully as it did at the Chicon, we're for it a million per cent . . . Next martyr? wh

MADGE'S "GROUP"?

Dear Ed:

Picked up the October issue of Madge a few days ago and after digesting it thoroughly I'd like to venture a few opinions. ARMAGEDDON 1970 heads the list, WANDERLUST next in excellence, and the rest of the stories showing poorly by comparison.

Now a question. Why does Madge concentrate exclusively on a certain select group of authors, namely: St. Reynard, Swain, Neville, Reynolds, Jakes, and Galouye? How about getting something from my favorite writer, Poul Anderson? Also Clifford Simak, Arthur C. Clarke, John D. MacDonald, Roger Dee, or Walt Miller. Don't get me wrong, Bill, I've got nothing against "your group" but let's have a little variety; shall we?

Lest you think I have criticized too highly, may I say that IMAGINATION continues to improve. So keep up the good work and soon you will be right at the top.

Paul Mittelbuscher
Sweet Springs, Mo.

This is really an odd request—keep the good writers you have but drop them to provide variety. This is an oversimplification, true, but the essence is there. Paul, the big thing about making a magazine good is to provide good stories. The writers you mention do just that. Naturally we do not intend to change this situation. But as to them constituting "our group", we feel you're being a little unfair. Take last issue for example; out of seven stories only two were by writers you name. In this issue out of six stories only one is by a writer you name. Is this playing favorite? Believe us, we'll buy from any writer—as long as the story meets Madge's high—and we do mean high — standard.

Names don't impress us, stories do. And after all, isn't that what you're reading for science fiction enjoyment? As to Madge improving, to coin a cliché—bub, just latch on to our rocket! wh

TWO TOP JOCKEYS

Dear Mr. Hamling:

My compliments go to you, the authors and the artists on the October issue of Madge. In my home town IMAGINATION is one length behind GALAXY, but Madge is slowly pulling ahead. Your two top jockeys, Swain and St. Reynard have the race clinched with their unique style of writing.

TOMORROW'S SCIENCE is a masterpiece in itself as a feature. But wouldn't an added mystifying fact about it be great?

Melvin Bartusch
Box 316, RR2
La Porte, Ind.

Got any suggestions on the "mystifying" angle, Mel? wh

AFTER SIX YEARS!

Dear Ed:

After six years of reading science fiction I finally got the urge to take pen in hand and write a fan letter. I read the October issue of Madge last night from cover to cover, and I think it's great!

I liked "HEY MA, WHERE'S WILLIE?" and COSMIC BLUFF very much—but PATROL was my special favorite. It was an unusual plot handled most adeptly. I hope to read more by Mr. Nelson in the near future.

I also enjoyed reading the letter column—it's gratifying to know there are so many avid fans. I should appreciate it very much if some of them would drop me a line. Joining a fan club would be

difficult since I am at school most of the year; but I do love to talk over my favorite stories with others who feel as I do about stf. I sadly admit that I have gotten no place fast with my class mates who seem to prefer bridge!

Thanks for a swell magazine.

Jane Krass Popper
Comstock House
William Smith College
Geneva, N. Y.

Now that you've broken the ice, Jane, let's hear from you more often. And say, don't give up on trying to form a fan club at school. We'll bet you can do it wlh.

BALANCED READING

Dear Ed:

I just finished reading the October issue of Madge, and frankly, I couldn't put the book down! I especially enjoyed SKIN GAME by John W. Jakes. Let's have more by this lad and the inventions of Mr. Fred Ajax.

ARMAGEDDON 1970 and THE COSMIC BLUFF were very readable, but "HEY MA, WHERE'S WILLIE?" was just a bit "hokey". The other shorts were up to Madge's high standard.

I enjoy Madge a lot, but I beg you, keep it the way it is!—A mixture of science and fantasy. Believe me, there's nothing more wearisome than trying to plough through a magazine with nothing but straight science fiction in it. But science fiction leavened with fantasy makes the best reading there is — and Madge has it!

Buck Latimore
Hardy Road

Lookout Mountain, Tenn.
Don't worry about a balanced reading content, Buck. Just remember Madge's full title—Stories of Science and Fantasy . . . We'll see about

Mr. Ajax for a future issue . . . wlh

TOPS ON HER HIT PARADE

Dear Mr. Hamling:

After reading several science fiction books I turned to magazines. Since I've been reading IMAGINATION I've been completely sold on it. I am fifteen and therefore haven't been reading too many years, but I have sampled all the stf magazines on the newsstands. My two favorite publications are Madge, first, and OW, second. It may be surprising but I do not like ASTOUNDING. I can't seem to get interested in its stories

I personally don't like serials; I'm one of those people who like to read every story complete. As for a Personals column, I agree with Jerry Hunter. Get one by all means.

I really enjoy your back cover feature; TOMORROW'S SCIENCE. I always find it interesting and educational. Also, I must add my cheers to your friendly editorials and of course, the stories in Madge are tops.

Catherine Mouquin
141 Oakridge Ave.
Summit, N. J.

No serials on the horizon—and a Personals column coming up . . . wlh

REPRINTS . . . NUTS

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Just finished the October issue of Madge and had to write in.

The cover was excellent, very eye-catching and the novel it illustrated, ARMAGEDDON 1970 was equally interesting. St. Reynard did a good job at characterization. The realistic quality of the story held me all the way.

WANDERLUST, with its miniature climax-ending was a nicely told tale. When I start to "feel" the

emotions of characters I know the story is good.

SKIN GAME was below par, sorry to say. A neat idea but the story structure was too flimsy.

"HEY MA, WHERE'S WILLIE?" was as nicely turned a tale as I've had the privilege of reading for many moons. Regardless of the fact that the plot and trend were obvious from the start, it was told in such an entertaining manner that I could find no fault.

PATROL was more sophisticated but definitely interesting. I was ready to rate this one high because of the wonderful way in which Nelson depicted the feelings and sensations of the patrol—until I came to the last two pages. Now I've got nothing against using God in a story as a personality either in a vague or direct manner. In fact I feel that this is mentally stimulating. But I feel the presentation in this instance was something of a letdown. Perhaps I'm presuming in my assumption that a *jealous* deity is a concept not only out-dated but rather musty with the self-centered beliefs of a way of thinking that belongs outside the intelligent speculations of stf. At any rate, that particular depiction of one of God's attributes spoiled the story for me. Only the admirable ending itself kept me from feeling rather belligerent about the entire concept.

THE COSMIC BLUFF was a good old blood and thunder stf tale—and how I love them! Nice entertainment.

As for this reprint war raging across the country, all I can say is Nuts! There are enough magazines with reprints on the market today to satisfy any who have missed the much ballyhooed "classics". The short and sweet of it is that, for a while at least, a reprint magazine hauls in the old coin without too

much waste of precious (?) brain power editorially, so why shouldn't they yelp when their toes are stepped on? As for me, give me the new stories every time. Maybe the "classics" were and are good, but if editors would cooperate we'd have even better tales to pin gold medals on for the next generation. Why stagnate? Anything that stands still or reaches into the past is liable to do just that. Stf fans are supposed to be progressive, far-thinking people. They're reaching for the stars in fact as well as in fancy, so why look backward when there's a whole new world (and worlds) of literary talent ahead . . .

Your comments in the editorial on the saucers re St. Reynard's interpretation of them were quite interesting. I'm glad to see that the editorials of IMAGINATION are being used for constructive, intelligent thought in keeping with the ideals of stf. When an editor gets so much fat on his brain that all he can do is sit and write such drivel as: "I can't think of a thing to say at this time, etc." I start to wonder if that same attitude is detracting from his selection of story material. Fortunately, Madge is definitely not in this category.

Jan. Gardner
Apreldelon
Canterbury, N. H.

Jan son, you really said a mouthful when you said reprints are like dipping into the past instead of forging ahead to new literary goals. Your thought about stagnation in this respect is quite interesting . . . Rest assured you'll never find reprints in Madge! . . . Your comments on PATROL were also very interesting. However, we didn't get quite the same impression you did—certainly not a letdown. Matter of fact the story gives us a nice lift! . . . wh

BACK COVER GRIPE

Dear Bill:

The October issue of Madge to hand, so this letter. You know, I don't know how you manage to pack so many wonderful stories in one issue. But you do it. The October number is especially wonderful. While I haven't read the novel yet I just couldn't wait to comment on the short stories.

WANDERLUST . . . excellent! The realness, the human sorrow, the approach make a beautiful story. A classic.

SKIN GAME . . . John Jakes turns out many clever and different stories. This one has some nice humor.

PATROL . . . another excellent tale. Beautifully written, and only a little loosely woven at the end, I was pleased with the frankness and insight of such a theme—and the editor who printed it.

THE COSMIC BLUFF . . . I enjoyed Reynold's NOT IN THE RULES (April '51 Madge) but the sequel was even better. The plot of course was standard but the author's handling, his choice of words and light satire, made the yarn very enjoyable. In my opinion handling is more important than the plot although it takes excellence in both to make a really fine story.

"HEY MA, WHERE'S WILLIE?" . . . I couldn't rate this one better than good. The surprise end seemed rather pointless to me.

Three writers in this issue were new to me . . . Alan E. Nourse, Richard H. Nelson, and I.-M. Bukstein. It is hard to believe the first two are beginners. Are they?

I don't care for your back cover photographs. They have no purpose that I can see—on a sf magazine. An astronomical photograph has its place in a scientific journal, or ac-

companying an article, but not as a back cover. Why not a painting of some kind?

In checking over the novels in eight straight issues I find that you haven't published a single bad one. Good record!

Ron Smith
332 E. Date
Oxnard, Cal.

Our new back cover feature seems to be quite popular with most readers, Ron. Why photographs? Why not? After all, we write and think of the stars—isn't it natural to want to see them in greater detail—through the eyes of giant telescopes. And don't forget, man will visit them someday—that's where TOMORROW'S SCIENCE comes in . . . Nourse, Nelson and Bukstein are all newcomers to the field. In regard to Nourse and Nelson, we predict you'll be seeing a lot of them . . . wlh

MORE "FAN" LETTERS

Dear Bill:

This time it's your October issue I'm howling about—or at. Depends on what I think of it, y'know. Well . . . the stories were all good for once. Not a lemon in the batch. As rating them would be an injustice I'll let that slip by.

Y'know, there's something different about Madge that I haven't been able to put my finger on until just now. But I think I have it . . . FANDORA'S BOX is one of the top fan-columns in any prozine. In my opinion, at any rate, and that's what we're discussing for the moment. What irks me is the fact that such a good fan column should be accompanied by a letter column which sticks out like a sore thumb—since there is such a dearth of fan letters. What's the matter . . . don't actifans read Madge? You print dozens of letters asking what egoboo and fan-

zines are, but not one which uses those words. Don't you get any letters from all the fan letterhacks? One reason I like to read the letter column is because I can read more letters by the guys I write to myself. FANDORA'S BOX and the letter section are almost as different as north and south.

Take a good look at the letter column of SS or TWS and then look at Madge. Not that I mind a few letters from non-fans or neo-fans, but a steady diet of them gets a little boring. I just can't bring myself to vote for a "best" letter as a result since I don't enjoy any of them. One thing I do know, for saying all these things I'll probably get no "best letter" vote but several bombs in the mail . . . I'm not opening packages for two weeks after this sees print . . . if it does.

Dick Clarkson

410 Kensington Road
Baltimore 29, Md.

Madge's letter section is not slanted toward any particular group of readers, Dick. This department is for all readers and it will remain that way. To use your own point, nothing could be more boring than a solid section of letters from any one particular segment of readers.

Sure Madge gets a stack of mail from acti-fen but it also gets an even larger stack from people who are not active in fan circles. And here's a thought for you as an acti-fan to mull over: the letters from people who are not active today can be the opening door to their full participation in fandom's activities tomorrow. Not all, true, but some, yes. At any rate, in Madge's letter column any reader can express his or her views. If the acti-fen seem to be in a minority here it's only because they are! As to FANDORA'S BOX, it serves a dual purpose: to review all the cur-

rent fanzines, and—most important—to acquaint our vast science fiction readership with the active fan field. We think Mari has been doing a swell job of this and we know that fan editors have written us many times saying their reviews in Madge have helped bring in many new subscribers. In regard to the "best" letter ratings, we're going to drop them unless a majority of the readers protest. Since many letters are from non-active fans, they don't take an interest as yet in "collecting" original illos. Most of the ratings come in from steady letter writers and thus the rating system is not quite representative. So unless there's a loud protest we'll drop the ratings effective with this issue . . . wh

MORE PHOTO COVERS COMING

Dear Bill:

While I was reading St. Reynard's fine novel in the October issue it occurred to me again that one illo is not enough for your lead story. You should have at least three, preferably five . . .

About your back cover. How about getting a series of photos of the various planets of the solar system? And maybe a short article on the subject of that particular photo.

Roses and orchids to Bill Terry for his cover this month. This is the best you've ever had—and that's something!

Speaking of covers, how about a photo-interplanetary cover? Takes a lot of work but Malcolm Smith is the boy who can do it . . .

Ted Hinds

Box 718

Ukiah, Cal.

We've already featured Jupiter and Saturn on our back covers, Ted, so I guess we're ahead of you on that suggestion. As to the interplane-

tary photo cover—you must be psychic! Not only is this a terrific idea, but we've been closely guarding our little secret for many months. What? Simply that Malcolm Smith has already come up with such a photo cover—using an actual photograph of space for background. It will appear shortly, so watch for it. How's that for service? wh

PRO REPRINTS

Dear Bill:

A very nice issue of Madge, the October issue, very nice indeed. Terry's cover is fair, typical pulp type—I'd expected better from IMAGINATION. Well, at least it was pretty well done.

Geoff St. Reynard's short novel is a horse of another color. Really an excellent story, as are most of his. Nourse's WANDERLUST was another good one with a very good illo by Terry. Jake's SKIN GAME was good, tho not terrific, ditto Bukstein's short. Nelson's PATROL was very good, and Mack Reynolds' COSMIC BLUFF excellent.

My main reason for writing at this time is in regard to your comments on reprints in the editorial. You say that use of them "narrows a writer's market." So what? The narrower the market the better the stories that get printed, or haven't you heard? You seem to think that a writer, just because he is a writer, is a sacred being who must be catered to and fed at all costs. I say that if he can't sell to a narrow market then he shouldn't be writing for a living.

I'm quoting you again: "We contend that reprints in the magazine field are nothing more than literary larceny wherein the writer suffers and the reader is forced to plunk

down 35c for a story he has certainly read—if indeed it is a 'classic' as advertised by the editor, in which case it can be easily secured at the nearest public library."

This is the silliest bit of nonsense I've read since your editorial last November. Of the reprint magazines only three sell for 35c so it's obvious that you were exaggerating to make your point. And anyway, none of the three are solid reprint mags. You imply that all readers have read all classics, which certainly is not the case. In the first place, many wonderful stories have never been discovered by modern-day readers; in the second, many are extremely hard to find anyway, (and cannot be easily secured at the nearest public library) and third, often when they are found it's in a very high priced edition.

Terry Carr
134 Cambridge St.
San Francisco 12, Cal.

You're entitled to your opinions, Terry, just as we are. We still think a narrow market limits development of writing talent. Reprints tend to narrow it. We don't feel writers are sacred, we feel they're human and deserve the breaks too. What's wrong with that? Every reprint used means some original story didn't sell . . . Classics? Keep them in the musty past where they belong, revered, but not interfering with modern up-to-date fiction . . . As for some of the pulp reprint publishers, the "Save a buck" boys, we hold them in the lowest contempt. Thank God there are some reputable publishers who at least pay high rates for their reprints, notably in our digest stf field . . . well, that's all for this month. See you the 18th of December at your local newsstand. Or better yet, turn the page and get your big XMAS subscription! . . . wh

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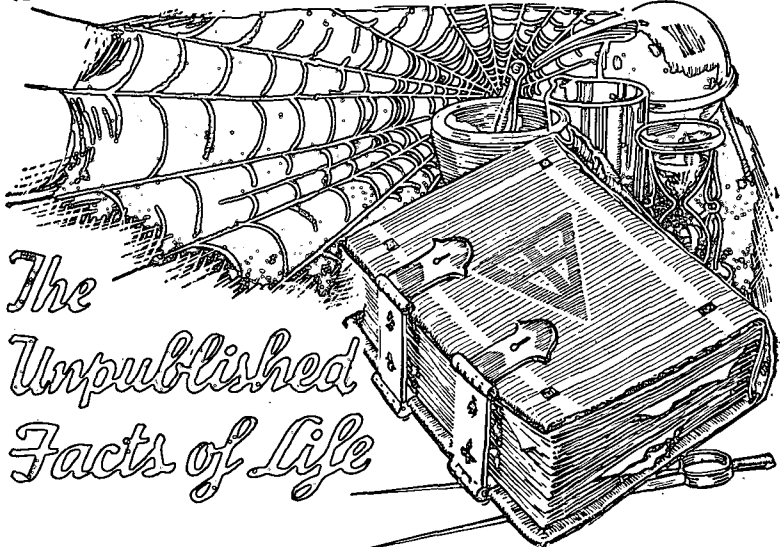
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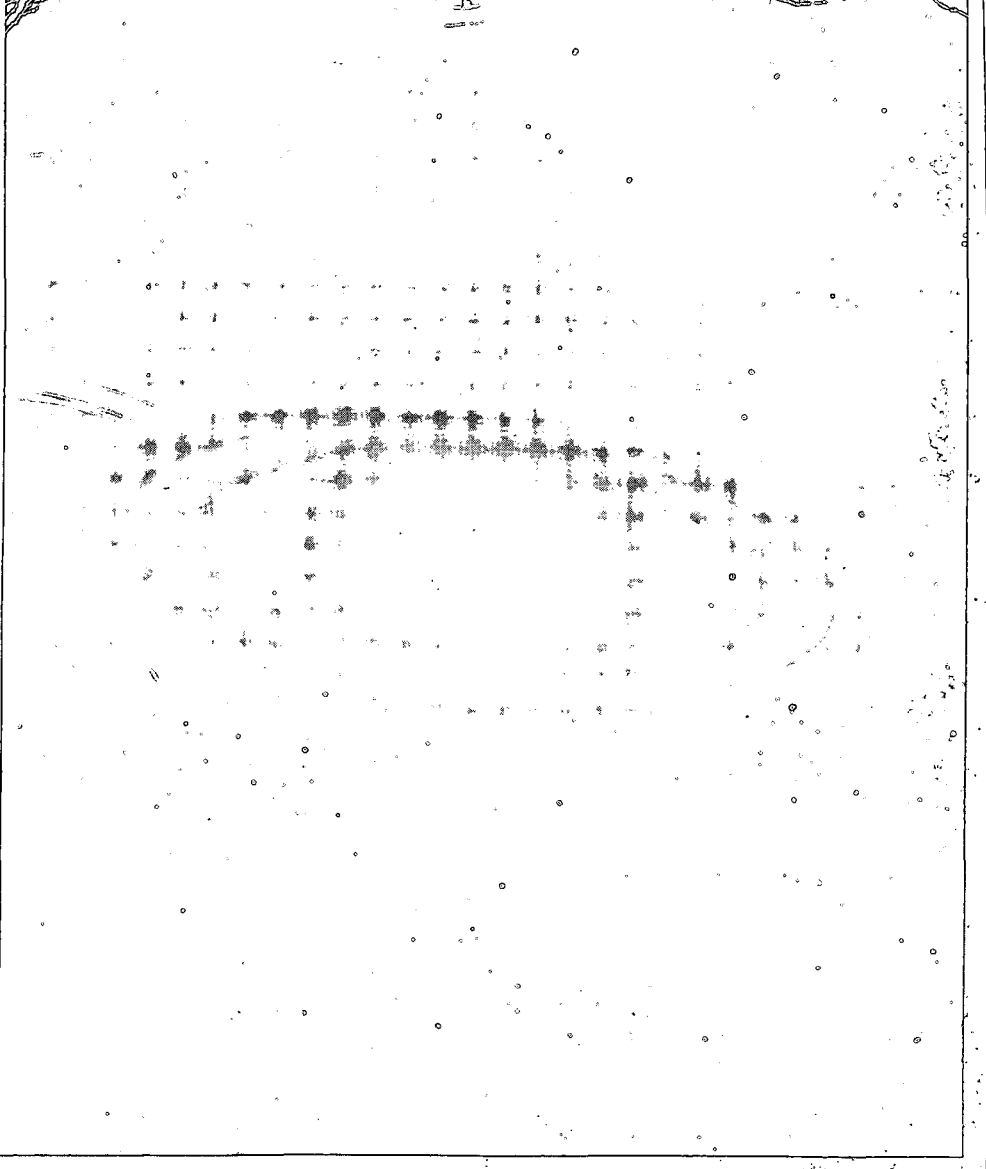
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